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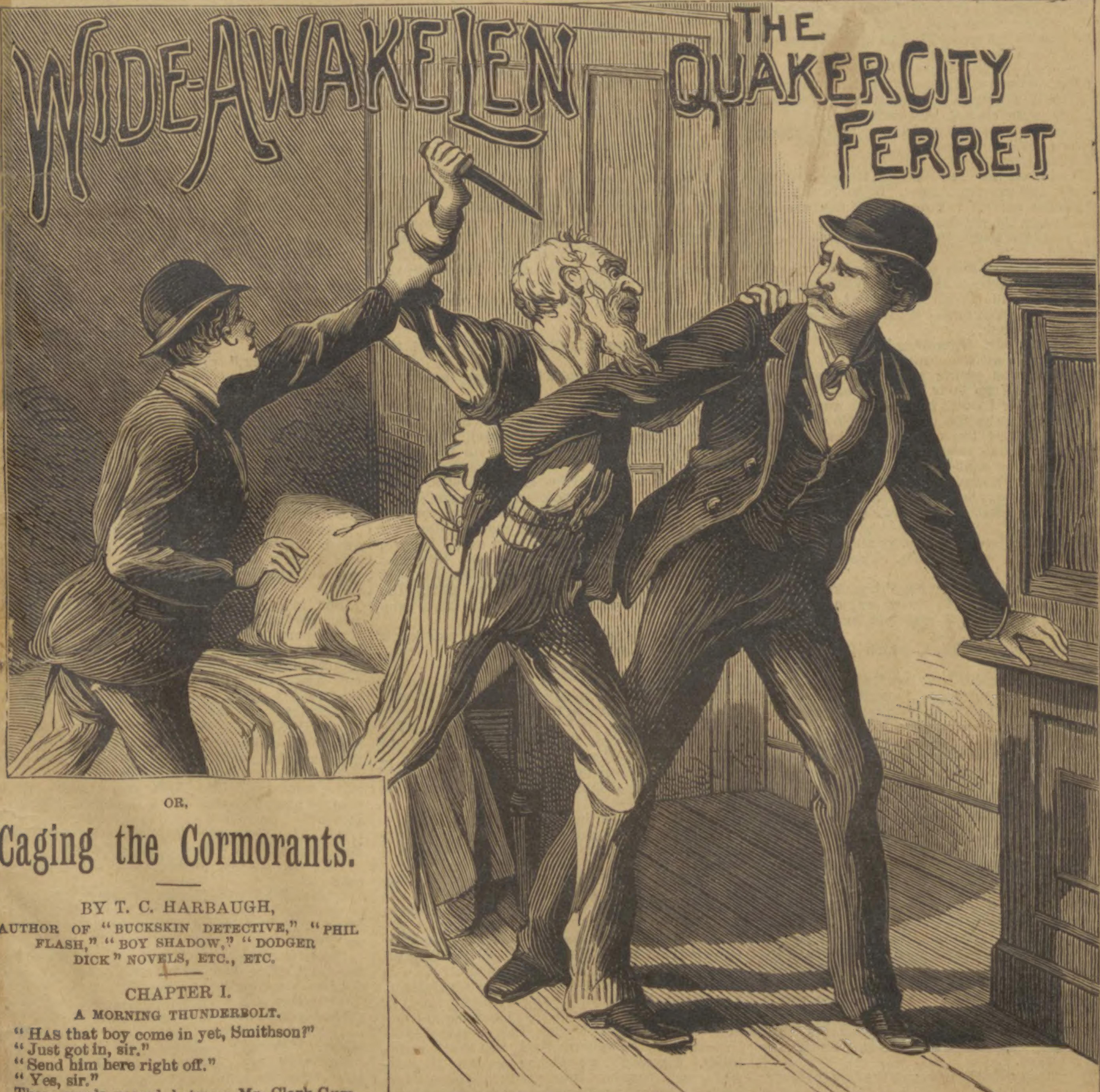
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OR, Caging the Cormorants.

BY T. C. HARBAUGH,
AUTHOR OF "BUCKSKIN DETECTIVE," "PHIL
FLASH," "BOY SHADOW," "DODGER
DICK" NOVELS, ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A MORNING THUNDERBOLT.

"HAS that boy come in yet, Smithson?"
"Just got in, sir."
"Send him here right off."
"Yes, sir."

These words passed between Mr. Clark Gummage, of the firm of Gummage & Blynn, No. — Arch street, Philadelphia, and Noah Smithson,

WHILE THE SOUTHERNER HELD OLD ISAAC IN HIS POWERFUL GRASP, WIDE-AWAKE LEN DISARMED THE VENERABLE VILLAIN.

an *attache* of the house one morning in mid-summer, not many months ago, and were followed by the immediate withdrawal of Mr. Smithson, who knew that Gummage was a little out of humor and not the man to stand any "back talk."

"The old man wants you at the office right away," said Smithson, running across a good-looking boy of sixteen who was changing coats in a little room where several sets of garments decorated as many hooks. "Be careful how you handle him; he's out o' sorts about something this morning, as one can see by his eye. So, look our for a storm."

The boy made his way to the office and gently opened the door. In another moment he stood in the presence of Gummage, who looked up from his desk with a frown, then he ran his yellow fingers into a handy pigeon-hole and drew forth a sealed envelope, such as the wages of clerks are sometimes made up in.

"Here, see if that's all right to date," said he, handing the envelope toward the wondering boy without so much as looking in his direction.

The boy tore open the envelope with trembling hands and took out some bills, and a piece of paper which looked like a monthly pay-roll receipt.

"This squares us to date, Mr. Gummage," he remarked.

"That's what I thought," was the surly answer. "Sign the receipt. You're discharged."

The last words seemed to fall upon the ears of the boy like a knell of doom.

"Discharged?" he echoed with a gasp.

"That's what I said, wasn't it? I aim to speak the English language, though I'm no Chesterfield. Sign the receipt, and retire."

The astounded youth could not stir for looking at Gummage in amazement.

"I'd like to know—"

"Time is too precious with me to stop and tell you why you are discharged," broke in the man in the office chair. "Your part of the transaction is to sign the receipt which you hold in your hand, and then to get out of the house as soon as you can."

The boy, now equally angered and astonished, mastered his feelings to a certain degree, stepped forward and dashed his name at the bottom of the receipt, then tossed it toward Gummage's hand and fell back.

"Good-day, Mr. Gummage," said he. "You may hear from me some other time."

"Get out, you young scamp. My eyes are open at last. Keep your distance and don't use any threats, for I won't put up with any."

Len Dalray gave the gruff old fellow another look, and quitted the office, going back to the little room above mentioned, where he threw over his arm the coat he had lately doffed and quietly left the house.

As he passed out he met Noah Smithson, who seemed to have stationed himself at the door for that purpose.

"It's quits between Gummage and me, Noah," announced Len with a smile. The long face of Noah seemed to lengthen.

"What was the matter boy?" he asked.

"Heaven knows. He never explained anything, but paid me off and told me to go, and was insolent about it, too."

Len held out his hand, which the old man took.

"I'll see you again, Len, boy," said he. "By the way, come to my room to-night, say, at six. Don't forget it. I have something to talk about—something I can't talk about here."

"I'll be on hand, Noah," and a moment later young Dalray was walking up Arch street, once more in the employ of no one.

"I wonder if Gummage saw me last night?" he suddenly asked himself. "He couldn't have been in that closed carriage that crossed the bridge. I stood in the shadows as best I could, and was hard to see. I would like to know what made him give me my walking-papers this morning, and I'm not going to stop till I do know, that's certain!"

Half an hour later Wide-Awake Len ran up a flight of steps on a short street a few squares from Arch, and opening a door entered a small room which was occupied by a man who sat in a listless manner in an arm-chair, which was drawn up to the open window. This person was about five and forty; his figure was rather heavy, for it filled the chair which held it, and there was a green shade over his eyes.

"Is that you, Len?" asked the man as the boy went forward.

"It's nobody else," answered the boy in cheery tones.

"What brought you back so soon? They haven't given you a holiday, have they?"

"Yes, and a very long one at that." An ashen pallor overspread the man's face. "You're not discharged, Len?" "I'm discharged," was the response. "Who did it?" "Clark Gummage."

"What for?" "I don't know. He wouldn't tell me." "He wouldn't tell you?—the infernal rascal!" grated the man in the chair, who was so near blind that he could just distinguish darkness from light. "He turned you off without a word, eh? Did he pay you, Len?"

"Oh, I'm paid in full. There's not a cent between us, thank Heaven!"

For several seconds the man at the window remained silent, though the boy could see by the workings of his countenance that he was fighting within himself a mental battle.

"I'm putting two and two together," he observed at last, a smile passing over his face.

He had turned his chair from the window, and was facing the boy he could not see.

"What sort of horses were attached to that carriage, Len?"

"The one I saw cross Girard Avenue Bridge last night?"

"Yes." "They were bays." "The carriage was entirely closed, you said?"

"Entirely shut up." "And it was warm, too—almost suffocating. I could hardly get any air, even at the open window; and yet that carriage was shut up."

The boy did not reply, but looked at the man and waited for him to proceed.

"I think that episode had something to do with your discharge," continued the blind man.

"I would have sworn that I was not seen; there are deep shadows on the bridge," Len hastened to explain.

"And there were keen eyes in that carriage," laughed the other. "Mind you, I don't say that Clark Gummage was on the inside, but somebody was there who saw you, and Gummage was told about the circumstances. That is why you got your papers. You didn't see Blynn?"

"Mr. Blynn is not in the city. He went over to New York yesterday."

"To New York, eh? Seems to me he goes over pretty often."

Len smiled.

"What are you going to do now?" asked the man.

"I'm going to find out a few things," answered Len, resolutely.

"I'm glad of that. Be careful; you know some things already, and enough to tell you that you are dealing with desperate men. The paw of the tiger is soft, but it can kill all the same; the snake looks pretty with its glossy skin, but it can crush a giant to death. Be careful, I say, Len, my boy. I have no one else but you."

"I will be careful, don't fear," and the outspoken lad laid a hand in the man's palm. "I want to baffle the rascals who are, I believe, playing one of the deepest and most infamous games ever played in this or any other city. It makes my blood boil when I think of it. I'm going to beat the Cormorants, or know why not."

"I can't help you very much, but you know where to go if you need assistance."

"To Captain Ferrars, the detective?"

"And my friend," added the blind man. "Yes, Len, if you need help, Dick Ferrars will give you all that lies in his power."

"I sha'n't go to him till I have to. Too many hounds spoil the chase. I'm going out now, and maybe I will not be back till night. I have an engagement with Noah at six."

"With old parchment-faced Noah?" and the blind man smiled.

"He isn't pretty, but I like him."

"I think he is honest, Len. Tell him to drop in some time. I'd like to hear his tongue go, once more."

The boy replied that he would convey the message to Noah Smithson, and then left the man at the window, and was soon on the street again.

"I don't have to be on deck at six to-morrow morning, nor the next morning, either," laughed Len to himself. "Thanks, Gummage! You've given me the very string I've been wishing for. I can stick to the trail day and night, now. I want to find who rode in the closed rig and behind the bays last night. The carriage came from toward Fairmount Park, and that's something. I guess I'll go out and see Mrs. Mennessee," and turning into another street, Len walked a square and boarded a car, which finally carried him into Girard avenue and bore him toward the Park.

He crossed the bridge and smiled as he passed the spot where he had stood the night before, for the events which had occurred there all rushed back to him, and, a few minutes later, he alighted and knocked at the front door of a plain house, into which he was ushered by a little middle-aged woman who seemed surprised to see him there at that hour.

CHAPTER II.

TERRIBLY CONFRONTED.

LEAVING Wide-Awake Len at Mrs. Mennessee's for the present, let us retrace our steps to the heart of the city and meet several men who are destined to become prominent characters in our story.

Not a great distance from the somewhat well-known establishment of Gummage & Blynn stood a queer-looking house to be in that particular part of the city. It was a cross between a business house and a dwelling, and was used at the time for both purposes.

The lower floor was taken up with a lot of trumpery which at one time might have been called furniture. Here were second-hand tables and stands of every description, and people who wanted to sell some old trash in this line, and those who wanted to be cheated when buying the same, came to this "depository."

The store was presided over by a rough-looking man whose crooked nose and little eyes betrayed his nationality, and at the moment of our visit he was not alone. The back part of the room was quite dark, dark enough for a light, though none was at hand, and Isaac Wendel was talking to two men who seemed to have some important business with him.

"You've got the money and we know it," asseverated one of these men, a tall, dark-faced person of nearly fifty. "You've got stacks of it, so don't lie to us."

The proprietor of the store cast a fearful glance toward the door in front.

"Yes," chimed in the other, "we know you've got the chink. Don't we offer you good security? What are you growling about?"

"I don't know this Mr. Gummage."

"You don't, eh?" with a laugh. "You don't know that he is at the head of the house of Gummage & Blynn? Why, he's good for fifty thousand."

Old Isaac passed his hand over his forehead hesitatingly.

"Talk quick," urged the tall man, menacingly.

"I tell you I haven't got the money just now."

The next moment the tall man's companion, in response to a look, threw one arm around the old Jew's neck and drew him close. At the same time the other opened his bosom and jerked out a greasy pocketbook, which seemed well filled, after which he told his companion to "hug" their victim a little harder.

In vain did the furniture-dealer struggle in the grasp of the robber. He was relieved of his wealth in a moment, and when the two men released him he sunk to the floor like a dead man.

But, before consciousness left him he heard whispered at his ear the ominous words:

"Report this to any one and we'll take your life! A word to the wise ought to be sufficient," and with the old man lying on the floor, the two men walked out as coolly as though they had been bargaining for some of the second-hand stuff.

When they reached the street they kept together for a time and then separated, one going one way and the other taking the opposite route. The man with the pocketbook went toward the river, but turned into Arch street and walked rapidly until he came to Gummage & Blynn's, into which he dodged and disappeared.

"Is Mr. Gummage in?" he asked of Noah Smithson against whom he nearly ran.

"He is. Name, please," the old man requested.

"Name be hanged!" cried the other. "If he's in, that's all I want to know," and he bolted toward the private office, stared at by Noah till he vanished.

Clark Gummage received a shock when he heard his office door open and looked up to see the man standing before him.

"Haven't you forgotten?" asked Gummage.

"Were you to come here, or—"

"Never mind what I was to do," broke in the caller. "I've got something for you," and he threw upon the desk the pocketbook he had taken from the old man of the furniture-shop.

Gummage looked at it staringly; then his hand pounced upon it and his long yellow fingers encircled it like talons of an eagle.

"I would rather you had not brought it here," he remarked. "Did anybody see you come in?"

"Nobody but old Leather-face," was the answer. "He wanted me to give him my name, but I was too sharp for that."

"Did you have any trouble in getting this?"

Gummage was looking at the pocketbook again.

"Not much. We had to hug the old fellow a little. It didn't hurt him, and he knows better than to look for the pocketbook, for we told him what's what before we came away."

Opening a drawer before him, the senior partner dropped the pocketbook into it and then took out his own.

"Something for present needs," said he, counting out some bills of good denominations, which he passed over to his visitor. "You know how to divide them. When do you go away?"

"To-night."

Gummage looked up at the clock on the desk, and seemed to mentally count the hours that lay between the present time and nightfall.

"I'm much obliged to you, besides," he added.

"I hope you will have a nice trip. Good-by."

The two men shook hands, and Gummage was alone.

"You wish me a nice trip, don't you?" laughed the man who walked from the store with a chuckle on his tongue and a smile overspreading his face. "I don't blame you, Clark Gummage. Some men are born fools, and you're one of them. Yes, I'll have a pleasant time with your money."

Gummage waited till the office door had shut on his visitor, when he brought forth the pocketbook which had been taken by force from old Isaac Wendel. He locked the door before he investigated the wallet's contents.

Opening it, he took from its depths some papers which he began to sort out. All at once, he paused in his investigation, looking at a curious thing to be in such a hiding-place.

It was wrapped in oil silk, and when he unloosed the folds, there fell out upon the desk an arrow-head, which was black in color. The point was almost as sharp as the point of a needle, and the barbs were well-defined.

Gummage took it up with the greatest care and looked at it scrutinizingly, a full minute.

He went through the papers, one by one, but returned to the arrow-head and handled it again with the same care as before.

"It's worth more than all the other things," he murmured. "I got it cheap, too. I would have given twice as much for it rather than have missed it altogether. It doesn't look dangerous now, with no bow or shaft near by; but it is dangerous all the same—to those who know how it can be used!"

He restored the stone to the silk and put it back in the pocketbook and placed the whole within the steel-doored safe in the office.

"I'm invincible now," mused Gummage. "I'm armed as man was never armed in this country. They may talk about the steel armor of old. Bah! I'm better protected than ever were the knights of old," and Gummage's laugh was a laugh of triumph, and when he had transacted the daily business of the office he went out nodding pleasantly to all his employees, especially to old Noah, as if he recalled the title his last visitor had bestowed upon him—that of Old Leather-face.

Gummage was a bachelor, but he lived in elegant quarters in a good quarter of the city. He was used to taking his meals at a restaurant near by, and feeling somewhat gaunt, when in the vicinity of the tables, he sauntered in and sat down in his usual corner.

Several hours had passed since the events we have recorded and the restaurant was not very well patronized at that particular time of day.

"Mr. Gummage, I believe?" asked a voice as Gummage took the chair.

Mr. Blynn's partner looked up, to see before him a man well dressed, not thirty, a little pock-marked, but at the same time not bad looking.

"I am Clark Gummage, sir," answered the merchant. "To whom have I the pleasure of listening?"

The stranger came close, sidling round the table like a tiger stealing upon his prey, unable to resist. The face seemed to glow with strange power; the eyes fairly snapped in their scintillation.

"I guess you don't know me; but, that's not strange, seeing that we have never met. My name, however, may not be strange to you."

"Perhaps not," said Gummage.

"Well, I am Neil Porterhouse, son of Jasper Porterhouse, late of Feliciana Parish, Louisiana."

Gummage fell back in his chair with a gasp. If there had been anything in his throat he would have strangled. As it was, he seemed to be choking; his face was both flushed and pale, and above him stood Mr. Porterhouse looking down at his consternation and evidently enjoying the scene.

"You appear to have heard the name before," cruelly added the man. There was no answer. Gummage was looking at him, as yet unable to utter a single word.

"Did you think I was dead?" he went on. "I'm not the kind that die to suit people who want them dead. How much have you made with the start you got that night?"

Not until then did Clark Gummage find his tongue.

"I thought you were dead, but I'm not afraid of you," he cried. "I am doubly armed—"

"Have you got that deadly arrow-head?" broke in Porterhouse. "If you have, I want to say that I'm poison proof!"

A derisive laugh followed the words, and Gummage with a cry of terror fell from the chair and lay like one dead at the stranger's feet.

CHAPTER III.

THE LONG-LOST TRAIL.

"THE termination of that interview was somewhat remarkable," said Porterhouse to himself, when he had left the restaurant with Clark Gummage under the servant's care. "I am the last man he was looking for, and no wonder. He seemed to go down like a person bullet-struck when I referred to the poisoned arrow-head and told him that I was poison proof. I wonder what he will do when he comes to and thinks the matter over? But I can't stay to see; I have other business on hand. Let me see: what is his number?"

He took a little memorandum-book from his pocket and looked at an address which he found in it.

"Ah, yes!" he exclaimed. "Carlton Crisp, No. — Race street," and then he put up the book and walked rapidly away.

It was not long before he went up the stairs that led to the blind man's room. There was a good deal of eagerness on Neil Porterhouse's face.

"I wonder if he will know me?" he muttered. "Pshaw! he cannot, if his eyes are so bad; but, he may recognize my voice," and then, having reached a certain door, he knocked, to hear a voice on the inside invite him to enter.

The man from Louisiana opened the door and stepped forward, to find himself face to face with a man seated at an open window. The eyes were hidden by a green shade, but the face was turned toward the visitor.

Porterhouse went forward.

"How are you, Crisp?" said he.

The man in the chair started violently.

"It is Porterhouse!" he cried. "I can't see you, but I would have known you among a million, by your voice. Sit down, but let me hold your hand. I'm very glad you've come. When did you get in?"

"I reached Philadelphia this morning, and already I've knocked one man down."

"What do you mean? You haven't had a fight, I hope?"

"Oh, no," laughed Porterhouse. "I didn't touch him. I only leaned over a table and said a few words. He dropped like a beef."

"The meeting must have been accidental?"

"Entirely so. I dropped into a restaurant to get a bite, and he came in. Do you live alone here, Crisp?" and the caller looked around the room as he put the question.

"No; my eyes and I live together."

"Your eyes?"

"Yes. I must have some one to see for me, since I can't see for myself. Len is out just now, but he will come in presently. Len is my eyes—Wide-Awake Len. You haven't seen him? He is the boy who wrote the letters that have passed between us. He will be delighted to see you, for he knows that you—"

The blind man paused abruptly, for there were steps in the hall, and the next instant Len burst into the room.

Seeing a stranger with his friend and foster-father, the sharp-witted boy stopped at once.

"Do you know this gentleman, Len?" asked Crisp.

"I do now, though I have never seen him before. It is Mr. Neil Porterhouse," and Len advanced and put forth his hand.

"Yes, boy, the gentleman is Neil, to whom you have written so often at my dictation. He came in this morning, and I am sure is ready to help us. He had a singular meeting in a res-

taurant this day, and a man whom he addressed fell in a swoon at his feet."

"It must have been Mr. Gummage," assumed the boy.

Porterhouse smiled.

"You seem to know," said he, looking at the lad. "Yes, I had the luck to run against him quite early, and thought I would show my hand a little. He went down in a jiffy, and I left the servants to bring him to."

"Where have you been?" asked the blind man before Len could reply.

"Out to my friend's—Mrs. Tennessee's," was the answer. "I am trying to trace that closed carriage of last night."

"What luck?"

"More than I looked for."

Here Len turned to Porterhouse, who seemed deeply interested, and addressed him:

"It's my duty, now that you have come, to tell you briefly what we know about the Cormorants—that's what we call them," he continued. "There seems to be four of them, and they are desperate men. The real quarters of the band are beyond the Girard Avenue Bridge, and somewhere in the vicinity of Fairmount Park. Three weeks ago a man was robbed of a lot of money and some very valuable papers. From what Carlton, here, has told me, your house was robbed some years ago, and your father foully murdered in defending his property, but the trail of the robbers was lost."

"Somehow or other, Carlton, then a detective, discovered that the trail led to this city, and he came here in hopes of clearing up the mystery. He was getting along fairly well when, one day, he received a letter which pretended to convey some important information. The envelope that held it was very tough, and when he tore it open with a desperate effort, some fine powder, thrown out, flew into his face and cost him eventually his sight."

Here the blind man sighed and clinched his hands.

"We are confident that the Cormorant League sent that letter to Carlton for the express purpose of destroying his eyesight," Len went on. "It was a diabolical deed, but the League is capable of doing anything. Now, what have I done? Not as much as I wish, but I have not been idle. I have been trying to carry on the hunt where Carlton left off. He has given me his work, and I have followed his instructions. Last night I was passed on the bridge I have mentioned by a closed carriage which I believe contained the members of the Cormorant League of Philadelphia. I tried to conceal myself among the shadows on the bridge, but I may not have been entirely successful—indeed, I think I was not from what transpired this morning. I was discharged from the employment of Gummage & Blynn—turned off without the semblance of a notice. I was invited into the office, was then paid off and told to skip. That's the plain English of it."

"Who discharged you?" asked Porterhouse.

"Old Gummage himself," smiled Len. "I may know more about it to-night, for I promised to visit Noah Smithson at his house. Old Noah is attached to the house and lets nothing escape him. He may have picked up a few points, for he has a knack of whittling things down very fine."

"And Dora isn't slow, either, eh, Len?" Crisp suggested.

The young detective colored.

"Dora is Noah's niece, you see," he explained to Porterhouse, and with a glance at the blind man. "She is a knowing girl and can see through some real hard problems just by looking at them once. So you floored Clark Gummage without touching him, did you?"

"I did," smiled the Louisianian. "Now that I am here, we will look after the Cormorants together. You don't know their exact quarters?"

"Not yet, but they're not far from the bridge. The closed carriage passed Mrs. Tennessee's last night and has done so on several previous occasions. It's a deep game, and, as Carlton says, a little dangerous. Carlton believes that the murderers of your father came to this city."

"I do firmly believe it," cried the blind man, striking the arm of his chair by way of emphasis. "I was just getting upon the trail when that infamous letter came. Who sent it? One of the men themselves! I had to be made way with, and somehow or other they did not want to kill me, so they destroyed my sight. But, they did not know, Porterhouse, that I would get other eyes—that Len here, my Wide-Awake substitute, should see for me and follow the trail while I sat in darkness in this house."

The man from the South looked a long time at Crisp.

"Do you need any money?" he asked.

"None," was the reply. "You have been liberal, but I want you to answer me one question: Why didn't you come sooner?"

"I have been across the water. I have been three months on the Continent. I thought I had a clew to the Cormorants, and it took me to England."

"But, you did not find the clew there?"

"I discovered something. You recollect that my father was supposed to have been murdered by a poisoned instrument of some kind; that there was the merest scratch on his neck which the doctors said produced death?"

The blind man nodded and smiled.

"That was the theory."

"Well, my visit to England convinced me that it is the correct one. I fell in there with a learned toxicologist, or one who understands poisons of all kinds, and a night with him strengthened my belief concerning my father's death. The wild tribes of the globe have some singular poisons. They can poison their arrows until the merest scratch will produce death. Now"—Porterhouse leaned toward Len and the blind man and went on: "There lived in London, until a few years ago, an old Jew who dealt in everything. He had a hobby for dealing in these subtle poisons, and he kept it up until the police made it too hot for him. One night he left London. He came to America. I managed to find this out. He landed in New Orleans, where he settled down and where he stayed until after the robbery and murder. I did not know these things when I sent you to the trail, Crisp. I learned them by crossing the sea. Now, what has become of the old Jew?"

Carlton Crisp shook his head.

"What was he like?" asked Len, who had not lost a single syllable of Porterhouse's narrative.

"Something like this when he fled from England," was the reply, and Porterhouse threw upon the table at the boy's elbow a much carried photograph.

The young ferret picked up the picture and gave it a close scrutiny. Suddenly he uttered a sharp cry.

"I know that man!" cried he. "His name is Isaac Wendel and he runs a second-hand furniture shop on M— street."

CHAPTER IV.

A STUBBORN JEW.

THE man from the South was agreeably startled by the positiveness of the boy's reply, but the Wide-Awake boy again assured him that he knew Isaac Wendel by sight and a slight acquaintance.

"I do not say the Jew really had anything to do with the murder and robbery," added Porterhouse. "I only know that he dealt in some things that take human life in a secret manner—in the strange weapons of savages, for instance. When did you see the old artful dodger last?"

"Three days ago standing in the door of his shop," answered Len.

"Are you busy now?"

"I have nothing to do."

"Then, let's go down-town and see the Israelite."

Five minutes later Len and Porterhouse were walking toward the second-hand shop of the Jew, and in due time the young Wide-Awake detective pointed the place out to his friend.

"But it's shut up!" exclaimed the man from Feliciana. "Is it possible that we have come too late to get a peep at the old scamp?"

Len did not reply, and they walked on until they found themselves at the door of the shop, or store. It was closed, sure enough, but the shutters were not up, showing that the Jew was still in the city—probably in the living rooms above the first floor.

"What's the matter here?" Len asked a boy who came out of the adjoining shop and eyed them closely.

"Old Isaac is sick. He's in a bad way up in his room."

"What ails him?"

"He won't tell, but from the way he goes on at times one would think he has been robbed by some city highwaymen."

"When did it occur?"

"This morning."

"Nonsense; nobody is going to rob old Isaac in his own shop," laughed Len. "Is the hallway open?"

"It was awhile ago."

Len Dalray led Porterhouse to the door opening into the hallway alongside the furniture shop, and the two mounted to the old man's room. A knock at the door elicited a low "Come in," and they entered together to dis-

cover Isaac drawn up on a dirty cot in one corner of the room.

Porterhouse looked at Len and nodded the moment he saw that descendant of Abraham; which meant that he had found the man who had run off from London; but Isaac, staring at his visitors with all eyes, was saying nothing, though he showed signs of fright.

Porterhouse bent over the bed and looked for a moment into the pinched face before him. Len drew near and gazed, too.

"I haf got nodings for you," old Isaac whined, drawing back as far as he could. "You took all I had v'en you caught me in mine shop. V'at more you vants with old Isaac?"

"We don't want to rob you, that's certain," responded Porterhouse. "I am not the man who despoiled you in your shop. What did he take?"

"I tell nodings. I vas robbed all de same."

"Have you informed the police?"

At mention of the police the old son of Israel seemed to tremble.

"I hates dem!" he cried, clinching his hands.

"I haf hated dem ever since—"

He stopped like a man on the threshold of a secret which he desires to keep to himself, and turned his face away from Porterhouse.

"Ever since you left England, eh?" ventured the man from the South.

The change that came over Isaac's countenance was as startling as sudden. He grew almost white, and his deepset eyes seemed ready to start from their sockets.

"Go away and let me die in peace!" cried the old rogue. "I haf been hunted long enough. I don't know you, but I know v'at you be—a detective from across the water."

Porterhouse rose and looked at Len.

"This man is actually dying," said he under his breath.

The boy ferret drew back, in surprise and apprehension.

"Shall I go for a doctor? There is one just around the nearest corner."

"Stay here! Go into the hallway and see that nobody comes in for a little while."

Len withdrew as directed, knowing well what the Louisianian proposed to do.

Old Isaac was staring into Porterhouse's face as if it recalled one he had seen somewhere before. His hands were clutching the cover and strange looking liquid was oozing from his mouth.

"What have you done with your collection of arrow-heads?" asked the visitor in a business way.

"I was robbed of the last one to-day. You don't b'lieve it I see, but I vas. They came in under pretense of buying some chairs, but they robbed me."

"Who were they?"

Old Isaac shook his head with an effort.

"Do you mean to tell me on your death-bed that you don't know who robbed you?" cried Porterhouse. "You ought to know who would be apt to want the last arrow-head."

"I don't know who took it."

"But that is not the question. I asked you who would be likely to want it," pronounced slowly and emphatically.

There was no answer; the old man took a long breath which seemed to give him pain, and shut his eyes.

"Did they offer to buy the barb?" queried Porterhouse.

"No. They just catch me round the body and while one holds me fast, the oder one robs me."

"What were they like?"

In reply to this question, so important to Porterhouse, there was nothing but a dull stare.

"See here, old man," he exclaimed, seizing Isaac's shoulder. "I have a right to know these things!"

"Who—are—you?" slowly.

"My name is Porterhouse. Do you recollect hearing of the murder and robbery of an old man in his own house in Louisiana, some years ago?"

"I do."

"Well, I am the son of the man who was killed and robbed. I have been to England. I discovered that you kept for sale—you would do anything for money—certain deadly poisons which, for the most part, are conveyed to the victims on arrow-heads and such things. To whom did you sell a poisoned shaft, say, three summers ago?"

"I forget," muttered Isaac.

Porterhouse's teeth met madly and his dark eyes seemed to flash, and he bent closer to the form on the bed.

"You don't forget," he said. "You know,

but you don't want to tell, that is all. You may live long enough to grace the gallows."

A queer smile came to the drawn face of the old Israelite, and his look wandered to one corner of the room where stood an old-fashioned desk which was almost as strong as an iron safe. In fact, it was the old fellow's treasure-box, and Porterhouse realized as much as he followed the glance.

"I tell you I forgets," reiterated Isaac. "I don't know who all I sells to."

"I wouldn't like to be one of your customers," returned the Southerner. "Men of your stamp keep a record of all their customers, for there is money in them long after the sale has been made."

"I'se no blackmailer," whined Isaac.

"Then you have been terribly misrepresented," smiled Porterhouse.

A moment's silence followed.

"Won't you let me die in peace now?" demanded the old sinner, whiningly.

"Not if the doctors can save you," was the reply. "I want the courts and the gallows to have a chance at you!"

"I can't tell you any more den I haf, so hellup me!"

The man from Feliciana turned and moved toward the old desk mentioned. If he had looked back over his shoulder he would have seen the restless eyes of the venerable rascal closely following his every movement.

Porterhouse had not covered more than half the distance between bed and desk when he heard a strange sound, and, turning, saw Isaac standing in the middle of the room, and about to launch himself upon him with the madness of a tiger!

"Stand off," cried Porterhouse. "If you won't tell me anything about your customers, maybe your desk will. Know what I want to I will—so interfere at your peril!"

The response he received was a wild cry, and the Jew came forward, holding in his bony hand a knife, which he must have had concealed in the couch. There was murder in the glazed eyes of the half-crazed man, but Porterhouse was quick enough for him, and when he threw himself forward he was deftly caught by the Southerner, and held as in a vise of steel.

Hearing the racket the boy on guard ran in to see Porterhouse master of the situation, and while the Southerner held old Isaac in his powerful grasp, Wide-Awake Len disarmed the venerable villain.

"Now keep quiet a few moments," ordered Porterhouse. "I won't rob you very deeply. Where are your keys? In your pocket? Yes, here they are," and producing the keys which he had found, the tall man proceeded to the desk, while Isaac, frothing more than ever at the mouth, looked on in a fit of helpless rage and fear.

All at once the little old fellow gave a strange cry and fell back on the couch in a faint, but Porterhouse did not stir. He had opened the desk by this time, and was rummaging among its contents.

In one corner of the main compartment he found two little books, in greasy leather binding. They had the impress of age, and looked like old cast-off diaries. A dirty string encircled them, and it was evident that it had not been untied for years.

Porterhouse seemed to start the moment he drew his find into the light. He cut the string and leaned to the light.

One look seemed enough, for he thrust the books into his pocket, and shut the lid of the desk.

"Come!" he said to Len. "The old chap will come out of his swoon by and by. We won't bother him any longer. If our find pans out poorly he won't have anything to regret; if we have struck it rich, ditto," and looking at Isaac for a moment, Porterhouse led the way from the room, and he and Len went down the stairs together.

"If Isaac was robbed this morning as he says," remarked Porterhouse, "it was the work of the Cormorant League."

"Always the Cormorants. We'll have to work hard to down them, Mr. Porterhouse."

CHAPTER V.

TRE CLAW OF A CORMORANT.

WHEN some distance from the house of old Wendel, Len and Porterhouse separated, the former going to another part of the city and the latter proceeding to his hotel, where he intended to examine the memorandum-books he had found in Isaac's desk.

At precisely six o'clock that day the discharged lad presented himself at Noah Smith-

son's house according to agreement. He found Noah and Dora his niece at home and was warmly welcomed.

Noah Smithson was a tall man with a skin like parchment. His face was perfectly smooth, and his eyes looked out from the depths of their bony sockets with a good deal of inquisitiveness. Dora, on the other hand, was fair and vivacious—the very opposite of her "uncle."

"I was out to see Mrs. Mennessee to-day," Len announced after the usual greetings.

"Oh, yes, the woman whose husband mysteriously disappeared some days ago. Has she any news of him?"

"Not a word," answered the boy Hawkshaw.

"Did she ever find that letter which decoyed him from home?"

"Yes; she ran across it this morning," and Len dived into his pocket and produced a crumpled letter which he handed to Noah, who adjusted his glasses and leaned toward the light.

"I want you to examine the letter carefully," continued Len. "Note the handwriting particularly. You may have seen some like it in the course of your life."

Ralph Mennessee, the missing man, was a private watchman, and had been missing for ten days. His wife, a friend of Len's, was greatly distressed, and there was about the circumstances something which led him to believe that the Cormorant League had to do with the disappearance.

For some minutes old Noah studied the letter carefully, then he arose and went to his desk in one corner of the little room. From this he took several letters which he carried back to the table, where he sat down again and went over them, comparing them with the decoy message.

While thus engaged, Len was conferring with Dora.

All at once the old clerk uttered a cry.

"What is it?" asked the boy, springing from his seat.

"It can't be and yet there is a similarity between the fatal letter and some of the writing I have before me."

The lad had approached the table. He leaned over Noah's shoulder and looked at both documents.

"Who wrote the letter in your right hand?" he queried.

"Mr. Clark Gummage," was the reply. "He sent me several when I was sick and housed up some months ago; but you don't suppose for a moment he had anything to do with Ralph Mennessee's disappearance?"

"I hardly know what to think about some things. I am sure the message in your left hand is the one that decoyed Mennessee from home and that he has not been heard from since going off. You see the letter asks him to call at No. — Sansom street. I have no doubt he went to that number, and that was the last ever heard of him by his relatives."

"Why do you associate the Cormorant League with his disappearance, Mr. Len?" asked Noah, turning so as to look the boy ferret in the face.

"I'll tell you. The night before the disappearance of the watchman, he followed a closed carriage into Fairmount Park. He told his wife something about it when he came home. It must have been the one I saw on the bridge last night. Mennessee followed the carriage so well that it had difficulty in eluding him, and his wife believes that he saw more than he cared to tell her. I am convinced that the Cormorants drove past me on the bridge. Now, you can put this and that together for yourself, Noah, and reach about the conclusions I have reached."

The clerk of Gummage & Blynn, rubber merchants, looked at the two letters once more and Len turned to Dora again.

"I saw you walking with a strange gentleman to-day," remarked Noah, glancing at Len. "Was he your new employer?"

"I was going to tell you about him when you had examined the letters. That was Mr. Neil Porterhouse from the South."

"From what part of the South?"

"From Louisiana. He is here on a mission of vengeance."

"Ah," exclaimed the old man. "Here on a mission of vengeance, eh?"

"He is anxious to discover who robbed and murdered his father some years ago," explained the youth.

"An old trail, I should say."

"Yes, but it is getting fresh again. I have promised to help him."

"You? I thought you had your hands full with the Cormorants."

"So I have, but what if the two trails should run together?"

Noah Smithson started and looked over his

spectacles; then he laid the letters down and was silent for a moment.

"If I were you, Len, I would be very careful how I entered into this fight. This League is all-powerful from what I have heard of it. If it decoyed Ralph Mennessee from home, it is strong enough to keep him from home forever, and the chances are that his wife has seen him for the last time."

"I will be careful, of course, but the more I think of the Cormorants, the more I want to run them down and see them suffer for what I believe they have done. They blinded Carlton Crisp, the man who took me out of the streets and adopted me. Why? Because he was on their trail and was running them down for the Louisiana crime."

"Is that true? Did the Cormorants have a hand in that?"

"They undoubtedly did," was the prompt assurance. "Think of it, Noah. You don't want such a League to exist in our fair city, do you?"

"I want to see it crushed, of course, but I don't want you to get into trouble for the sake of others."

Here the old man glanced at Dora, who was listening intently while she regarded the boy spy with an anxious look.

The conversation would have been resumed if the girl had not left her chair near the window, and crossed the room with her hand at her lips.

"Not another word about these things!" said she, with lowered voice. "There is somebody on the sloping roof outside, and underneath the window. I have heard a noise there once or twice this evening, but now I am convinced that we are being overheard!"

This was enough to silence Len and Noah, and the old man rising, went to the window and suddenly drew the curtain aside.

His action let a flood of light upon the roof, and the moment it fell there, a dark figure scrambled down and dropped out of sight.

"You were right," said the clerk, looking at Dora. "There was a spy on the roof, but," with a smile, "he isn't there now."

By this time Len was on his feet, his face flushed and his eyes filled with indignation.

"We may be able to catch him in the back yard," cried he. "I'll go and see, anyhow," and before he could be restrained, he rushed from the room and flew down-stairs.

Ten minutes later he came back, saying that he had found no one. If the spy had been discovered, he had also made himself scarce, for there were no traces of him in the back yard attached to the house.

Dora followed Len to the lower door, when he went away.

"I am sure it was not the first time there has been a spy on our roof," she asserted. "I did not like to say anything to alarm uncle. He doesn't sleep well of nights, anyhow. Two nights ago I heard the same noise I heard awhile ago, and when I threw back the curtain a man dropped from the roof to the ground. Why should they want to watch us?"

Len Dalray thought more than he said, and replying in a manner intended to disarm Dora's fears, he bade her good-night and went away.

"I'll go down to Porterhouse's room and see what he has found in old Wendel's diaries," said he to himself, and running over to Arch street he caught a car and ensconced himself in one corner.

The car would take him within two squares of the hotel where Porterhouse had taken rooms. It was almost entirely devoid of passengers when he boarded it, but it had not proceeded two blocks when a man swung himself up on the rear platform, and then came in.

He dropped alongside of Len with a glance at him, and then began to look at the other passengers.

The young shadower saw that the man was a stoutly-built person of forty or thereabouts, that he wore his coat closely buttoned to the chin, despite the sultriness of the night, and that he kept one hand in his left pocket.

"He's watching me," thought Len, who from the corners of his eyes had scrutinized the man from the moment of his entrance. "I am under espionage, and by the Cormorant League! Can he be the spy who was on Noah's roof tonight?"

When the car reached Eleventh street, where the boy had determined to quit it, the man was still sitting like a stick on his seat.

Len watched his opportunity, and when the car slowed up, he rose and alighted.

"Now, old fellow, will you follow me?" mentally exclaimed the boy.

His feet had barely touched the stones when

he knew that the seat he had just left held nobody, for the stranger had risen, and when Len reached the street he had him at his heels.

"Just as I thought. I am tracked by the League," passed through his mind. "If I go straight to the hotel they may discover the presence of Porterhouse in the city. But hold! didn't he meet Clark Gummage in the restaurant this morning? Now, if Gummage belongs to—"

He did not get time to finish his sentence, for at that moment, having reached a spot where the light of the nearest lamp did not strike, he felt his arm encircled by a hand of iron, and he was dragged into the mouth of an alley before he could resist.

"Give up that letter!" said a hard, stern voice.

"What letter?" gasped Len.

"You know. Here, hand it over. This is no time for fooling," and at the same time a hand was thrust into the very pocket where he had deposited the decoy letter, and it was abstracted.

"Now, be very careful, and don't antagonize us," continued the same voice. "We know all you do and will pay you in hard coin. A word to the wise is sufficient," and Len was pushed against the nearest wall and the man disappeared.

"Tracked and robbed by the Cormorants!" cried the boy. "Never mind, it will be my turn next."

CHAPTER VI.

PORTERHOUSE AND LEN CATCH A TARTAR.

FINDING himself alone and at liberty to move on once more, though robbed, Len Dalray left the alley in haste, but not soon enough to catch sight of the man who had despoiled him.

He made his way to the hotel, where he expected to find Porterhouse, and the clerk directed him to a room on the third floor.

Neil Porterhouse happened to be in at the time, and the young detective was soon closeted with him. The Southerner was seated at a table upon which lay the greasy books he had taken from old Isaac's desk, and when he saw who his visitor was a smile appeared on his face.

"They're just what I supposed them to be," announced Porterhouse, waving his hand toward the books. "These books contain some very dark business transactions between Isaac and his patrons. Some of the entries contain descriptions of his customers, in order that he might identify them in after years."

"For black-mailing purposes."

"For nothing else, of course. I find that on the 10th of June, five years ago, he sold a Kaffir arrow-head to a man whose name he gives as G. Clark, an American. Now, the Kaffirs of Africa make very poisonous arrows—so poisonous, indeed, that a slight scratch is said to be sufficient to produce speedy death. What do I know about G. Clark, my boy?"

"Yes, what about him?" queried Len.

Porterhouse smiled again, and took out his own diary.

"I happened to find out while in London, when looking over an old hotel register, that during the month of June, of the year mentioned in Isaac's diary, Clark Gummage was in England—not only in England, but that he stopped at the hotel two days before the sale of the Kaffir arrow-head to 'G. Clark.'"

Neil Porterhouse looked at Len some time before he spoke again.

"You've got a scratch on your hand there."

The boy shadow looked down at his hand and discovered that it was bleeding, and recalled his struggle with the man in the alley.

"Oh," said he. "I had a tussle with one of the Cormorants."

"Tell me," exclaimed Porterhouse, interested at once; whereupon Len spun the whole narrative, which was closely listened to.

"You are watched," was the answer. "I am watched, too!"

"You?" cried Len.

"Yes; twice since I locked myself in this room footsteps have approached and departed from your door. I am sure some one has been looking through the keyhole, but they did not discover much."

"The Cormorants, beyond doubt."

The Southerner nodded.

"The man who robbed you of the letter was the man seen on old Noah's roof," he decided. "He knew you had the letter and he followed you from the house. That letter was a clew to the men who decoyed Ralph Mennessee from home and probable murdered him, for nothing is too wicked for the League we are fighting."

"I don't think the possession of the letter will

help them much beyond keeping the handwriting in their clutches. I know what it contained; I can repeat its contents from memory."

"That is something," remarked Porterhouse, eagerly. "I'm glad you can do that. Now let's have it, Len."

Len proceeded and repeated almost word for word the contents of the letter he had lost, and Porterhouse took them down as they fell from his lips.

"So he was to have called at No. — Sansom street?" said the Southerner. "We'll see what sort of house that is, and maybe we can find a clew there. As to the purchaser of the arrow-head, these books don't prove much, but putting two and two together, transposing G. Clark in Clark Gummage, we get a little light. Still he may have bought an arrow-head in London and yet not have been connected with the murderer of my father. We'll drop this matter here for the present, and look after the house mentioned in the decoy letter."

"Now?"

"Right away," responded Porterhouse, rising. "Wait! There is that footstep again."

The man from the South crossed the room with a bound and threw open the door. He was just in time to see a figure flit round a turn in the corridor, but when he reached the head of the nearest staircase, it had vanished.

In a minute Porterhouse came back laughing, and, nodding to Len, the two went down.

The first man the boy caught sight of when they entered the office was a well-dressed gentleman lighting a cigar at the cigar case. He was sleek-looking and faultlessly attired and Len noticed that he was apparently unconscious of their presence.

When he had lit his cigar he walked out upon the steps in front of the building and looked around. Len and Porterhouse had followed after him and passed down the steps, almost touching him as they did so.

"Did you see that fellow?" whispered Porterhouse.

"I saw him; I could not help it."

"Well, that's the man who came to my door. He's one of the Cormorants; my head for a pancake if he isn't."

Porterhouse spoke so confidently that Len looked back and he saw the man come down the steps and move forward.

He conveyed this discovery to his companion.

"After us, is he," grinned the man from the South. "I'll show him a trick he may never dream of. Just let him keep on. The sharpest fox gets caught sometimes. How is he now?"

"Following us still, sir."

"Lead the way to Sansom street. Don't let on that we see him at all. It all depends on our wits. I'm his equal in many ways, and I want to let him know it."

The two friends walked on, the man following them at a respectful distance but with the tread and look of the born shadower.

"Let's turn down here," suggested Porterhouse, turning into a small side street. "It's as good a trap as any to catch the fox."

Len obeyed, and looking back as he did so, saw the spy follow them, as if he did not suspect any danger.

"Do you know anybody on this street?" the Southerner suddenly asked the young ferret.

"Only one person, a young doctor who has his office a block below."

"Go straight to it and walk right in," continued the other. Len nodded and obeyed.

Arrived at the doctor's office, he opened the door and stepped in, followed by Porterhouse.

"What in the world is he going to do here?" Len asked himself. "I don't know what to say to Doctor Howard; but he doesn't seem to be in, anyhow."

The outer office was lit up and untenanted. Len turned to see what Porterhouse was doing, and found him standing at the door, but in a position which would prevent a passer-by from seeing him, but at the same time let him have a look at the man on the street.

The Louisianian was waiting, tiger-like, for his prey!

A full minute had not elapsed when a quick footstep was heard and Len saw the shoulders of the spy.

Porterhouse saw them, too, and the next moment he had seen the face of the trailer. It was the same one recently seen at the cigar counter in the hotel.

When the man came opposite the door, Porterhouse turned the knob and opened it without any noise. Len saw him pass out and disappear, and moving toward the door himself, he saw that the Southerner had caught his man!

"Don't give us any trouble," Porterhouse was

saying to the stranger. "I don't like to be followed."

"I haven't followed you, sir," was the hot response. "I will call you to account for this if apologies are not made at once. I am a gentleman, my name is Wilson—"

"Never mind, Mr. Wilson. My name is Porterhouse, but I guess you know that already. You will go with us a little distance and answer a few questions I don't like to put to you here."

The man drew back and one hand moved toward his coat, but Porterhouse, ever on the alert, arrested it half way.

"The quieter you keep the better it may be for you," he warned, looking the stranger in the eye.

"Well go on, then. I don't like to be seen here and in this position."

Still holding to his prisoner's arm, Porterhouse turned back toward the doctor's office, but passed it and, guided by Len, struck Sansom street. The prisoner seemed very docile now, but Len and his companion did not take their eyes from him for a moment.

"I don't like his eye," thought Len. "If he is a Cormorant, he needs watching."

The words were hardly out of the boy detective's mouth when the prisoner turned upon Porterhouse with the fury of a tiger. In an instant he had thrown the Southerner against the nearest building and had drawn a knife, long and dangerous looking, from his bosom.

"Down with that knife, villain!" cried the shadow, bounding to Porterhouse's assistance.

But the mad man gave no heed. He pressed Porterhouse closer to the building and before Len could reach him to interfere he had struck twice, and then released the Southerner.

The boy saw, with an ejaculation of horror, the attacked man slide from the scoundrel's grip, and the next second the assassin had bounded off and was round the nearest corner.

All this—the turning of the tables—had occupied such a short space of time that for a moment the boy shadower was paralyzed. The terrible scene had unnerved him.

He was recalled to his senses by a groan from Porterhouse, whose form straightened out on the stones, and when Len reached him, he looked up and said:

"Score one more for the Cormorants, boy!"

CHAPTER VII.

EYES AT THE WINDOW.

MR. CLARK GUMMAGE of Gummage & Blynn was alone in his bachelor quarters. He sat at a table near a lamp looking over some papers which had the appearance of age, and was so deeply engrossed in his task that he did not hear the gentle knock that sounded at his door.

The knock had to be repeated in order to catch his ear, and the man, hiding the documents, looked round and bade his visitor enter.

He started visibly when the door opened, revealing the tall figure of a man who came forward and stood before him.

Gummage looked up somewhat amazed and seemed to look the man over from head to foot.

"I'm not gone yet," said the stranger, with a smile. "I did not get off as I expected."

"So I see," was the answer. "It is very evident that you have not gone," and Gummage leaned back in his chair and waited for his caller to proceed.

This was the same man who had brought him the pocketbook and the arrow-head done up in oiled silk. Had he come for more money? It looked that way.

"Dick and I have concluded that we'd like to join and share with the rest of you," resumed the man, dropping into a chair without the semblance of an invitation and coolly crossing his legs.

The very audacity of the fellow astonished Gummage.

"You want to do what?" he exclaimed. "You speak in riddles, sir. I don't understand."

"I was afraid you would not," grinned the other. "Dick and I have a notion that we'd like to belong to the gang."

"To the gang?" echoed Gummage, still affecting to be in the dark.

"To the Cormorants."

"Man," said the rubber-dealer, "you have come to the wrong man for accommodation."

"I guess not," was the answer. "I know what I'm doing. We want to get into the League."

"What League?"

The man who had been watching Gummage all the time with the eye of a hawk, burst into a shrill laugh.

"I'm no fool," cried he at its conclusion.

"See here. You can hire us to rob an old Jew

for your own gain, but you don't want to associate with us. We know something about the Cormorants, Dick and I do. We know where they hold forth o' nights; we know what they do at their meetings, and I can track them from this seat to several darks deeds, which, if found out, would give all of you a free ride to the Penitentiary, if not a chance to dance a jig on the gallows."

Clark Gummage was looking at the man without a vestige of color in his countenance. He wondered if he had entered the house alone, and if his confederate, Dick, was not close by, ready to supplement the audacious application with a second one.

Such thoughts were in Gummage's head when he heard another footstep beyond the door and the next minute it opened without ceremony.

A breath of relief came to the merchant's rescue and some color grew on his cheeks.

He knew the man who had come in.

"I'll call again," said the first caller, seeing who had entered. "Please consider the application still before you all. Good-night."

He rose and went to the door, passing the second man, and in a moment was gone.

"Why didn't you stop him?" cried Gummage springing from his chair. "He should not have been permitted to leave this room alive."

"Why, who is he?" coolly asked the other.

"I don't know his right name, but he knows more than he should. He wanted to join the League."

"That man?"

"That man."

"He's a cool chicken, I think. Why didn't you take him in?"

Gummage smiled.

"I'd as soon want to take in a rattlesnake; but where have you been? Your clothes are all mussed."

"Oh, I've been having a little sport," grinned the other man. "I had to play cat to-night. What did Sandos get?"

"I haven't seen him yet."

"He was to watch the boy—your bright young clerk. I've been playing gentleman, with claws under my starched cuffs. I want to get rid of this toggery; in fact, I must, and that right away. Wait till I get into my old clothes."

The speaker retired to a room that adjoined the one in which this conversation had taken place and was gone ten minutes. When he came back he looked like another person, having exchanged his fine garments for a suit which completely altered his appearance, and he no longer looked like one of the young swells of the Quaker City.

Meantime Clark Gummage had locked the door so as to be safe from unwelcome intruders, and the man took a seat at the table.

"Have you recovered fully from the encounter at the restaurant?"

"I hope so. Never had such a shock in all my life. Think of suddenly facing a man who has been dead for years. Who looked for Neil Porterhouse in the flesh?"

"It was enough to unstring a fellow's nerves—that's a fact. But he hasn't been dead, you see."

"Of course not; his presence in the city proves that. He's come North for vengeance. He as good as said so."

"What did he say about being poison-proof?"

"He boasted of being so," was the reply.

The listener laughed again.

"Well, I have news for you," said he. "Old Isaac is dead."

"The old man of the deadly merchandise?"

"Yes. He died a few hours ago—died alone in his room over the second-hand shop. There's nothing wrong about the death. I happened to pass the shop on my way here and was told about it. On second thought I went back and out of curiosity went up to look at him, with the morbid crowd, you know."

"Were you in his private room up-stairs?"

"Yes."

"Where his papers were?"

"Where he kept his precious things. I saw his desk in one corner of the room, and knowing that it might contain something of value to us, I managed to get to it and ransack it and that under the eyes of twenty people."

"And what did you find?" eagerly inquired Clark Gummage.

"Nothing of value to us. If Isaac kept an account of his customers, as has been said, it was not in his private desk, and I searched it thoroughly. I don't think he kept anything of the kind."

"Maybe not," responded Gummage, somewhat relieved. "I'm glad, of course, to hear that he didn't. Dead, eh? I might have waited. But

never mind; it's just as well perhaps," and he turned to the table and took up a cigar.

"I thought I'd drop in, change clothes and tell you this," continued the man. "It is a piece of news which don't hurt us. I'm going now. If I see the man who left awhile ago, I'll tell him that he—and his pard, did you say?—can prepare to join the Cormorants."

Gummage's look became a stare.

"You don't mean that?" he cried.

"Why not? It's easier to take care of an enemy under your eyes all the time than to have him playing against you in the dark an' under the guise of friendship."

"That's a fact."

"Then, I'll tell him if I run across him."

The rubber-dealer sat like a stone in the chair for some minutes after his visitor's departure.

"I wonder what Neil Porterhouse is doing?" he murmured at last. "Heavens! how he did frighten me at the restaurant. It is time for Sandos to come in. I'd like to know what he has discovered by his shrewd plays."

At that moment the door opened and a man slipped into the room.

"I've been waiting for you," cried Gummage recognizing him at once.

"I didn't come straight here," was the reply and the speaker put his hand into his bosom. "I made a pretty good haul to-night, though."

The next instant there fell upon the table at the rubber-dealer's hand a letter which he poured upon in a flash and held up to the light.

"That is it. By Jove, you were lucky, Sandos. Where did you get it?"

Sandos grinned from ear to ear.

"I had to resort to a little force, but nobody was hurt," said he.

"Ah, you had to rob some one, you mean?"

"Only a boy."

The letter which Gummage was holding in his hand almost fell from it to the table.

"Did he have it, Sandos?" he asked.

"Yes, your discharged rat had it. Of course he got it of Mrs. Mennessee."

"It was to be obtained nowhere else," remarked Gummage. "We'll fix it right here and forever," and he rose to his feet and held the decoy letter in the flame of the jet until every vestige of it fell from his hand, ashes.

Shortly after Gummage was again alone, and as if fearing that he would receive another visitor if he remained in that room, he shut up everything and went out.

Down on the street he threw the stump of his cigar away, and walked off briskly. Not long afterward he turned up at his own store which he entered with a pass-key, and moving through the dimness inside entered the private office where he knelt before the safe, which he opened.

With the aid only of the light that straggled into the little apartment from the lamp directly opposite the store, he took from the safe the old Jew's pocketbook and removed from one of its stalls something incased in oiled silk. Then he locked the safe again and went away, without having seen the pair of keen eyes at the window.

Clark Gummage had been watched, but by whom?

CHAPTER VIII.

PORTRHOUSE'S ADVENTURE.

THE face at the window was the face of a boy. The sharp eyes followed Clark Gummage from the little office and saw him quit the store.

When the rubber-dealer struck the street again the owner of the face was close upon his heels, and kept track of him until he re-entered his boarding-house.

Then, falling back, the boy, who was Quaker City Len, watched the place for almost an hour, when, seeing that Gummage did not come out, he went away with a smile of triumph on his face.

"I've been tracking an old fox," said Len, entering the presence of a man who sat at a table with a green shade over his eyes. "In other words, I've been watching Clark Gummage, my old employer."

"And with what result, Len?" asked Carlton Crisp, the blind ferret.

Len sat down and told the whole story, and the blind man did not let a syllable escape him.

"So he took a pocketbook from the safe and from that, in turn, a small package, did he?"

"That's right."

"And the little package was wrapped, or seemed to be, in oiled silk?"

"As near as I could see, it was."

The detective bowed his head in his hands and thought a while.

"I wish we could keep that package in sight, my boy," said he, putting out his hand till it rested on Len's wrist.

"He took it home with him."

"Yes, which shows that he expects to use it. What do you think the package contains?"

"I know what Porterhouse told me about his trip to England and what he learned there about old Isaac's business," was the reply.

Crisp nodded.

"You mean that the package may contain one of those deadly arrow-heads?"

"I do."

"If the story Porterhouse tells is correct in every particular, and I see no reason to doubt it, the chances are that Clark Gummage took from his safe to-night one of those bars. Now, what is he going to do with it?"

"What do you think the Cormorants would do if they found themselves cornered?"

"Why, they'd use that point with its deadly poison," was the quick response. "Certainly they would. Since the furious attack on Porterhouse has failed, thanks to the blind madness of the man who attacked him, the Cormorants will try again. They now know that the son of the man who was robbed and murdered in the South is on their trail; that he knows that they are here in the Quaker City, banded together for a dark purpose; that he will not let up until he has run them down, and, knowing all this, they will try to baffle him, yet not one of them will run away."

"There is no doubt about Clark Gummage's connection with the Cormorant League."

"Not the least doubt, Len. He may be at the head of it; I think he is. He looks anything but a dangerous man, but these are the very fellows we have to fear most. I once tracked a minister half-way around the globe, and twice he turned on me like a tiger. Look out for the arrow-head of the Kaffirs."

"I shall. I know where it is—in Clark Gummage's hands."

While this conversation was in progress in Carlton Crisp's lodgings, the man whom we saw last in the mad grip of a well-dressed person armed with a knife was walking half-carelessly, as it seemed, toward Fairmount Park. He had left the busy city behind him and was moving slowly along where the lamps seemed very wide apart.

At last he turned aside and knocked at a low door set between the two front windows of a small frame house.

The woman who opened the door looked at him for a moment and then invited him to enter.

"You are Mrs. Susan Mennessee, I believe?" said the visitor, who was handsome, with a darkish skin like some people born under a warm sky.

"I am Mrs. Mennessee," was the response, and then she continued: "I cannot tell you whether I am a wife or a widow."

"So I understand, madam. My name is Porterhouse," at which the woman started slightly. "I have called to talk about the strange disappearance of your husband, the private watchman."

"I will tell you all I know about it which is not very much. I believe you know my young friend Len?"

"I do," said Porterhouse. "He is very active in your behalf and we are sworn friends and on the same trail. Now please go over the whole ground for me."

This Mrs. Mennessee did, and was listened to with attention by the Southerner who did not speak again till she had concluded.

"Do you think he had discovered the destination of the closed carriage which has repeatedly passed your house?"

"I am thoroughly convinced of this. It can't be far away for it never stayed away long after going out, and when it came back it was going at a good gait, and once or twice I heard the laughter of men on the inside."

"Are there any empty houses out this way?"

Mrs. Mennessee thought a moment before answering.

"There was one some days ago but it has been taken I believe."

"Where is it?"

"It is the last house on the next street. It is but a few steps from it to the Park. You couldn't well miss it even after dark."

"Do you happen to know who took it last?"

"No, but my husband said the night before he disappeared that the empty nest seemed to have birds in it—not that it had, mind you, but it appeared to have."

"I understand you."

"Are you going to look after that house?" resumed the woman.

"I don't know but that I might," smiled the man from the South.

A few minutes later Porterhouse went away and bent his steps toward the house mentioned by Mrs. Mennessee.

"If there are new birds in the nest I want to get a glimpse at their feathers," he muttered, as he went along. "The nest of the Cormorants is what I'm after."

In a short time he had turned into the street at the end of which stood the suspected building, and a brief walk brought him to where it loomed against the stars.

As the woman had told him, it stood alone, its nearest neighbor being so far away that he could not distinguish its shape after dark.

Porterhouse approached the place with a good deal of caution, and found it as silent as the grave.

He seemed to have reached the limits of the city, for the sounds that came to his ears were but the echoes of the hum of business and travel far away, and not a soul crossed his path.

The Southerner passed the house, looking at it closely, then stopped and came back, but managed to slip round it and get a view of it from the rear.

"The very place for a nest of conspirators," said he to himself. "They could be well hidden here, and the sharpest man-hunter would have a nice time finding them. However, I'll see what the old trap will yield me."

It did not take Porterhouse long to get close to the house, and he was soon listening at the lower windows. Nothing rewarded his work until he was about to retire, when a window was raised directly over his head, and, looking up, he beheld the head of a woman.

"Ho," thought the Southerner, remaining as stationary as a post, "one of the birds of the nest, eh? I did not know there was a female Cormorant," and he kept his eye fastened on the head as long as it remained in the open window.

When the window was shut down a light was seen in one of the apartments of the house, and the tracker, catching the sill above his head, drew himself up and looked in under the curtain, which was a mite short. It was a very dangerous position for a spy, for, if discovered, he might be shot before he could drop to the ground, but Porterhouse, having escaped a keen-edged knife, did not let this prospect daunt him.

At first he did not see any living person in the room, but in a moment a woman entered and set a lamp on the table.

She was still young and strikingly beautiful. Her figure was tall and sinewy, her face very dark, and her eyes, deep-set, were as black as her hair.

"I am going to keep the nest for them but a short time longer," Porterhouse heard her say, thanks to a crack in the glass. "I don't like this life. If they are brought to justice I will be in the same boat, and there ought to be something better than this for me. If I go back on them I might as well quit this country, for I would not be safe between the oceans. They would be at my heels wherever I went, and I would be afraid to close my eyes a second. I wish some one would close in on them, but who can do it?"

She stood at the table while she spoke, but when she finished she dropped into a chair and trembled as if her executioner had suddenly entered the room.

Porterhouse grew tired of hanging to the sill, his whole weight on his hands, and he was forced to drop. This he did when he could hold on no longer, and in falling, he alighted among some crockery which he had missed before and the next moment the window was raised and he knew that the woman was looking out.

The man from the South lay perfectly still, hoping to escape the keen eyes above, but he was seen and in a flash he found himself covered by a revolver.

"Stand up. I see you," he heard in commanding tones. "You are a spy and the fate of spies is death."

The Southerner stood up.

"Shoot!" said he to the woman. "Add another crime to the list you already own. I am the man who can pull you out of the mire. Kill me and be forever in the clutches of the men you serve, but hate."

There was no answer; the weapon covered him for a moment longer, and then the window came down with a bang, and the light inside vanished in a twinkling.

CHAPTER IX.

FIGHTING FOR HIS OWN.

NEIL PORTERHOUSE went back to the city with strange feelings.

He was confident that he had discovered the

nest of the Cormorant League, but the identity of the woman mystified him.

She had held him at the mercy of her revolver, yet she had spared his life. This seemed to tell him that she was anxious to escape from the power of the League, but could not without help, and Porterhouse was ready to aid her if the scheme promised to bring to light the men he was after.

While the Southerner was at his hotel thinking over these things Quaker City Len was having an adventure not a little exciting considering everything.

The reader will remember that by watching Clark Gummage he had tracked him to the store where, by aid of the window, he had seen him open the safe and take out something wrapped in oiled silk, that after this episode he followed the rubber merchant home, and had watched the house for his coming out but without avail.

Despairing of finding Gummage any more that night, the young detective sought another part of the city where he knocked at a door which was opened by a girl who greeted him pleasantly.

It was Dora, Noah Smithson's "niece."

Len had not seen her since the night of the last interview when there was a spy on the roof and the girl's face showed a good deal of anxiety.

There had never been any secrets between the two, so Len did not hesitate to tell her about the stabbing of Porterhouse by the man who had followed them from the hotel, nor omit an account of his own robbery.

"They'll be suspecting Noah next," cried Dora.

"I think," said Len, "that they suspect him already. The spy on the roof will tell his employers all he knows, and they will think that Noah is against the Cormorants."

"That is about what I told him this morning."

"What did he say?"

"He smiled in his peculiar way and said: 'Let 'em suspect.'"

Len drummed on the table for a moment, and then looked up at Dora.

"Might I look at the papers which Noah compared to the one I got at Mrs. Meunessee's?" he asked at length.

"Certainly; there'll be no harm in that," and the girl went to a secret place and found a bunch of keys, with one of which she opened old Noah's desk in one corner of the room.

"Why, the papers ain't here," she suddenly cried, looking at Len.

"Not there!" exclaimed the boy ferret. "May be Noah took them away with him."

"I'm sure he did not. He told me to watch the desk well when he went to the store."

"Have you been away and left the house unwatched?"

"I have been to market, but I wasn't gone over half an hour, for market is handy, you know."

The face of the girl was quite white and full of fear. Len had crossed the room and stood before the open desk.

"He kept his important papers in his particular corner," continued Dora. "The package is not there now. It has disappeared."

"Do you know it was there when you went to market?"

"I remember opening the desk to get a little change for a few purchases, and am quite sure that I saw it in its place then."

"It looks as though it was stolen during your absence," said the boy. "This is the work of the Cormorants."

Dora sighed, and the next moment sunk into a chair.

"I don't want them to harm Noah, he has been so kind to me," said she. "I regard him as a father, though I know he is but my uncle, or at least he says he is."

"What are your first recollections, Dora?"

"I don't recollect my father at all," was the reply.

"When did you first meet Noah Smithson?"

"That's a hard question to answer. I have known him almost all my life. We have been living together so long that I have grown near and dear to him, and he to me."

"Yes, yes," smiled Len. "Has he never spoken of your father?"

"Nothing more than to tell me that he died long ago, and that my mother preceded him to the grave."

"Now, of what do the lost papers consist?"

"Really, I cannot tell you in full. They consist, in part, of several letters from Clark Gummage, Noah's employer; besides this, they consist of some papers which he seems to think

very important concerning a matter which he would never let me into, perhaps because he thought it did not concern me."

"An old secret, eh?"

"Something like that, you know."

"Were the papers all together?"

"They were tied up in the same package."

"Their loss will set very hard on Noah, won't it?"

"I'm afraid it will nearly kill him," replied the girl. "He is very careful about his things, and I don't see how I can meet him and tell him that I did not obey his injunction."

"But you had to go to market, Dora; the marketing had to be done, and there was no other person to do it."

Dora did not smile much, and Len, going to the window, pulled aside the curtain and looked across the street.

Directly opposite the house stood a street lamp which threw its light for some distance on every side. As the young detective looked at it he caught sight of a figure leaning against the iron post. At first it did not look much like the form of a man, but by and by it became such, and he watched it forgetful of Dora and her narrative.

It did not take the girl long to notice his actions. She saw him drop the curtain, but not enough to prevent him from still seeing the man he had espied, and in a moment she had tripped to his side and was asking him what he had discovered.

"Look at the man under that lamp," said Len.

Dora did so and fixed her eyes upon the apparition.

"Why, he seems to be looking at the house," said she.

"That's just what I think he is doing. There; he moves away now, but not far."

The man had drawn back from the lamp, and its light showed that he was not very tall, but well set and agile.

"A spy!" cried Dora.

The young shadow said nothing, but continued to eye the strange man.

"There he goes, as if he has had enough," said Len, turning toward the girl. "I'm going away now. I guess you won't have another visitor very soon as the papers have disappeared."

"Will you tell Noah? He went out some hours ago and I have no idea where he can be found."

"It's a strange hour for him to be out, isn't it?"

"Yes."

Fearful of losing the man he wanted to follow, Len bade Dora a hasty good-night and left the house.

He went down-stairs and slipped into the street where he soon saw a figure that resembled the one he had just seen under the lamp. In an other moment he was on the trail and was being led along at a snail's pace.

Evidently the man followed was expecting to meet some one, for he walked slowly, and Len kept him in sight several squares, when the man met another person who seemed to join him by agreement.

He followed the two when he had them both under surveillance, and was in the act of turning into a new street when he almost ran against a man who recognized him with a cry.

"Noah Smithson!" cried Len, looking at the old clerk.

"That's just who I am," was the response.

"What are you doing here?"

The boy pointed at the two men and then drew old Noah into the shadow of a building.

"Have you got your papers with you?" he inquired in a whisper.

"No, of course I wouldn't carry them about me; they're too precious for that. You ought to know where I keep them."

"I know where they were," answered Len. "They were in the desk, but if you haven't them on your person, I'm afraid they've fallen into wrong hands."

Noah Smithson's reply was a deep gasp.

"What does Dora say?" he asked.

Len told the story in a few brief words.

"Heavens! if I have lost those papers I have lost everything," exclaimed the old man. "I have been robbed of the secret of a lifetime, and the person who took them must have known—"

He stopped and gasped like a man fighting for air in a close apartment.

"One of the men I have been following was watching the house a while ago," put in the boy.

"Which one?"

"The shorter of the two."

Old Noah started up and his hands clinched.

"He must be the thief," cried he. "Where

are they? They went down yon street, didn't they?"

"Yes, but they're out of sight now I'm afraid."

"Not out of sight," cried Noah Smithson. "They must give up my papers. Come!" and he started off and turned the nearest corner before Len could stop him.

Anxious to see what the old clerk would do, the boy ferret followed with the proper speed. Old Noah was some distance ahead as he could see by the light of the lamps, and the next minute he caught sight of the two men walking leisurely along.

A singular exclamation leaped from Noah's throat when he spied the men.

"I'll have my property or their blood!" Len heard him say, and in another instant he was rushing upon the men like a panther.

"The odds are against the old man," thought the boy. "He is no match for the rascals, and they won't hesitate to treat him roughly. He won't stop to count the odds, but rushes on like a whirlwind. Heavens! what an attack."

His last exclamation was drawn forth by a mad spring made at the shorter of the two men by Noah Smithson.

He came upon the fellow with the suddenness of a thunderbolt and Len heard him call him a thief as he jammed him up against a wall and began to search his inner pockets.

The tall man seemed thunderstruck for a moment and unable to come to his friend's assistance.

"You took 'em; I know you did!" cried old Noah. "You robbed me of my papers and I want 'em or your life."

"Help! help, Sandos," cried the little man.

This moved the other man to action. He sprung at Noah and seized him by the shoulder, but the old clerk shook him off and then, quicker than a cat, turned upon him and dealt him a blow with his left hand which sent him into the gutter.

"I've got some muscle if I do look like a mummy," cried Noah, and to Len's surprise he dragged the little man back to the wall and continued to search his clothes.

"I knew he had 'em!" suddenly exclaimed the old man, coming back toward Len and clutching something in his hand. "He had the stolen property next to his skin, but I've got it now, ha, ha, and they'll never get their talons on it again!" and the nimble-footed boy found it difficult to keep up with the speaker who seemed to have springs in his heels.

CHAPTER X.

"ODD OR EVEN?"

THE men so suddenly attacked by Noah Smithson looked dazed and did not recover from their surprise until the old clerk had vanished.

"I never saw anything like that," said the man whom Noah had despoiled. "The old mummy has the grip of a vise, and I thought his hands were going to meet in my windpipe. Which way did he go?"

"What, do you want another experience with him?"

"Not by a long shot. I did not see him go away."

"Oh, he went off with the boy and turned down yon corner."

"With that young ferret who is always sticking his nose into everybody's business but his own? We've got to look after him, Sandos."

The man addressed said nothing, but frowned and the two then walked away.

Meantime, Quaker City Len and Noah had gone to the latter's home where the old clerk examined his papers and found them all intact; not one was missing.

"It's really better than I expected," said the clerk, looking up into the boy's face. "I feel better now and will see that these documents don't fall back into the hands of the rascals. I'll turn them over to a deposit company, and take a receipt, for they're too precious to have lying round at the mercy of the sort of men from whom I recovered them."

Leaving both Noah and Dora happy over the lucky recovery of the stolen papers, Len went away, and soon turned up in Carlton Crisp's room, and the moment the blind man heard his step he uttered an exclamation of joy.

"I've been waiting some time for you," said Crisp. "I've had a very singular visitor."

"You?"

"Yes," a smile passed over Crisp's face as he spoke. "Of course I could not see him, but I recollect voices very well, as you know, and though my visitor tried to disguise his, I found him out before he had talked two minutes."

"Who was he, and what did he want?"

"I was sitting at the table thinking of Porterhouse and the long trail, when I heard a footstep in the hall. 'Come in,' said I, and the door opened. The next moment I knew some one was standing in the room looking at me, something which neither you nor Porterhouse would have done. Presently he came forward and said: 'Are you Carlton Crisp?' and I told him I was. Then he dropped into a chair and began to talk. He said he was interested in a man who had come to the city a day or so ago, that he could furnish that person with a clew to a crime which happened in the South some years back.

"Why did you come to me?" I asked.

"Because you were once on the trail yourself," he replied, "and Neil Porterhouse would naturally come to you on his arrival in this city." I then asked him what his name was, and he called himself 'John Backus.' I had to smile just a little, but I don't think he noticed it. I told him that, as yet, Porterhouse had not called upon me, which action I said was very strange, therefore I could not tell him where to look for the Southerner. He sat and talked a little longer, and then bade me good-night. He went to the door, as I could tell by the sound of his steps, but there he paused and looked back. I was certain that he did not go away for several minutes, and when he did go he shut the door easily and went down the stairs with the tread of a cat. That man was Clark Gummage, your old employer."

Len Dalray did not start nor show any great surprise. Carlton Crisp's narrative had prepared him for the man's identity, and he only smiled and said:

"A slippery eel, Carlton. You knew his voice, eh?"

The blind man's lips met.

"Of course I know it. I shall never forget it, for I have cause to remember it to the last hour of my life. The Cormorants are determined to silence Porterhouse; the League is bound to come out of this struggle victorious, and at any cost. Somehow or other, they have lost Porterhouse for the time being, or at least Clark Gummage has, and that is why he came to me for information which he did not get.

Len then detailed all his adventures since seeing the blind man last, and Crisp listened with eagerness. He was especially delighted with the story of Noah's success, and laughed when he learned how the old clerk rescued his papers.

"I wish you could have seen Gummage," said Len. "I would like to know how he was dressed."

"Ask Bessie," was the reply. "She sees nearly everything, you say."

"I'll do it," cried the boy. "I'll see her at once."

Leaving Crisp, Len ran down and crossed the street where the lamp-post stood and entered a small notion store.

He was immediately seen by a girl who came forward greeting him familiarly, and asking after Carlton Crisp's health.

This was the "Bessie" referred to by the blind man, and Len at once came to his errand.

He asked the girl if she had seen any one enter or leave the hallway directly across the street, and her eyes lighted up immediately.

"I saw a man come away not very long ago," said she. "He crossed the street just above and passed our store. I was standing in the door at the time and had a good look at him, that is, a pretty good look, for his hat was pulled over his eyes, as if he did not want everybody to see his face."

"What did he look like?" queried Len.

Bessie proceeded and gave him a good running description of the man, and thanking her for her kindness, Len went off. Of course he went back to Carlton Crisp in high feather.

"It was Clark Gummage in borrowed plumes," said he to the blind man. "I would know him among a thousand, but he will not wear the disguise very long."

"He may keep it on until he has found Porterhouse, or given up the hunt for the time being."

"Why, the other Cormorant spies know where the Southerner is," exclaimed Len. "Porterhouse has had them at his door in the hotel. I don't see why Clark Gummage should be looking for him."

"A little hunt independent of the rest. The rubber-dealer wants to play fox on his own hook. He's at it now no doubt."

"Then, I'm going out to see if I can't pick him up."

Ten minutes later the figure of Quaker City Len might have been seen moving through one of the open tree-planted squares which dot the early home of William Penn.

The little Park was well patronized that night, and he was giving everybody a good look.

The fact is, he had been on the track of a man who had entered the Park and was now sitting on one of the iron seats enjoying a cigar and seemingly at peace with the world.

This personage was neither Clark Gummage nor one of the men who had been despoiled by old Noah, the clerk.

Len stood off where he was not apt to be seen and watched him with much interest.

In a short time another man sauntered down the walk and after a look all around dropped beside the smoker.

"I'm getting tired of this," said the new-comer in an incautious tone. "He's got enough to make us rich, and we can put the clamps on him and realize at once. They're not going to take us into the Cormorant League any more than they intend to give us a million apiece. We ran a risk when we raided the old Jew and took his pocketbook. The old rascal is dead enough and can't identify us, but he don't want the world to know that he, one of the city business men, employs men to rob people."

"That's what he don't, Zyno," said the other man, with a nod. "Of course we've got a hold on him, and I'm about ready to tighten it."

"Why not make the break in earnest to-morrow?"

"I'm willing."

"What's the best plan?"

"I'm in for a bold game," was the answer. "We lose nothing by being bold. Here," the speaker stooped and picked up some small stones from the ground at his feet. "Odd or even? The guesser is to confront him at his place of business and win or lose the game for us."

"All right. I guess odd."

The holder of the pebbles opened his hand and counted them. There were eight.

"It's onto me," said he, with a smile. "I'm the man that's to meet him, and I'll do it in great shape, too. At ten, to-morrow, he will be confronted by a man in his private office, and he'll know just what he has to do. I don't intend to strike him for a baby sum. We know too much for him, and he'll have to pay well to shut our mouths. Let's be off, now," and the two, rising, went away, watched some distance by the boy ferret and then left to themselves.

Not long after the young detective went up the steps that led to Noah Smithson's abode and found the old man writing at his night table.

In a few words he detailed his adventure in the Park, and wound up by telling the old clerk to keep an eye on the man who was to call on Clark Gummage the next day, for Len did not doubt that the conference in the little Park referred to the rubber-dealer, nor that the men seen there were the ones who had robbed old Isaac Wendel, the Jew, in his own store.

"I'll keep my eyes open," said Noah with a smile. "I'll listen, too, if I get a chance and I think I can make one. By the way, where do you think Porterhouse is at this time?"

"At his hotel, if not on the trail. But wait. I would like to hear and see the blackmailer's dodge myself. It will prove another link against the Cormorants. I will call at the store at half past nine to-morrow."

"You won't stay long if Gummage sees you."

"He won't know me if he does," smiled Len. "There's a crack in the ceiling of the private office, and the room above isn't occupied. I must get into this room, and, once there, I'll use my eyes and ears in the interests of justice."

"This conspiracy is bigger than I thought," was Noah's reply. "But be on hand to-morrow and I'll see that you get into the room above the private office," and Len, the ferret, was off again.

CHAPTER XI.

THE UNEXPECTED TAKES PLACE.

The next day, at the appointed hour, Wide-Awake Len, well disguised, put in an appearance at the establishment of Gummage & Lynn, and was smuggled to the room directly above the private office.

The hour was half-past nine, and in a short time, if nothing happened, the man who was going to blackmail Clark Gummage, would make his appearance.

"Don't betray your presence, whatever you do," said old Noah as he withdrew, after locking Len in the room. "Look sharp and keep your ears open, for this may be an important move in the game. I don't like the way Gummage looked at me this morning. Can it be that he intends to give me my walking-papers, too?"

Len had been in the room before, and knew how to make himself comfortable. All he had to do was to remain perfectly quiet and await the coming of the man who was expected. He was sure that he would hear and see something which would have a

bearing on the fight against the Cormorant League, and he was ready to suffer a good deal of inconvenience to obtain information.

The hour of ten did not come with more promptitude than did the looked-for man who had won the trial of the pebbles in the Park.

For some time previous to his coming Len had looked down upon Clark Gummage writing at his desk, and the moment he saw the door open he felt that the crisis was at hand.

"A gentleman on very important business," announced Noah, who appeared at the door, and the following instant he ushered into the office a man, whom the boy overhead instantly recognized.

Clark Gummage, looking up from his work, seemed to know the caller at once, for a dark look overspread his face, and his teeth met madly. Evidently he was inwardly cursing Noah for admitting the man without orders, but the fellow was there, and the door was shut between them.

"Good-morning," began the visitor, dropping uninvited into a chair near the merchant's desk. "You were not looking for me, eh? Well, I'm here all the same, and we ought to transact our business without much lost time."

Clark Gummage seemed to look daggers at the speaker, as if he could guess the import of his mission.

"What is it?" he said gruffly. "I am expecting a business caller soon, and he will take up all my spare time."

The stranger, who was well built, with a smooth face, which looked the color of tanned leather, leaned toward the rubber-dealer and did not reply. He seemed to be studying Gummage as a man studies an animal he will soon have to attack.

"We've concluded to settle down in the West and try to be somebody," he said, letting the words ripple over his lips with the glibness of an oily villain. "But we can't do so without a lift in the beginning. You say you won't take us into the League, so we're forced to do something else. Ten thousand will start us nicely; it will buy a ranch and—"

"See here," broke in Gummage, with the air of a man who had concluded to play a bold hand—to "take the bull by the horns" as the saying goes—"I can give you no such sum, not even at the risk of giving you and your pard a boost on the road to honesty. It is time wasted to talk of money to me. Let us drop the matter here and forever."

The face of the man who listened to these words was a study, and the owner of the keen eyes surveying the scene from above, could hardly keep back a laugh.

He fell back in his chair and for a moment looked dazed while Gummage coolly regarded him.

"You mean that you won't pay anything?" he finally said.

"That's just what I mean if I didn't say it," was the reply. "I try to talk good English. I can't pay you men a dollar, because I've settled with you before, and—"

"He paused. He was on the verge of saying that old Isaac the Jew, was dead, and could not be a witness to the fact that he had been robbed, but he let the sentence go unuttered.

"Look here, Mr. Clark Gummage: we stand between you and something very disagreeable. You may say that we are in the mud as deep as you are in the mire, but we are two to one, and from the life you've led before, and are leading even now, I guess our word would go just as far as your own."

Gummage seemed to swallow hard.

He understood what the man meant. If he did not pay the money demanded, the two rascals with whom he had dealt, would turn on him and get him into the clutches of the law after making a bargain with the courts by which for what they knew against him they were to escape themselves.

"You are striking in the dark," continued Gummage. "We never met until a short time ago, and I should have had more sense than to have employed such men as you two."

"In the dark, ha?" laughed the other, showing his teeth. "I guess not. We could unmask you and surprise the denizens of this city at their breakfast tables. Don't intimate that I don't know anything about your past life. I know more than you would have me know. I know when you were in England not as Mr. Clark Gummage, but as another gentleman entirely different; I am aware that you left the island between two days and just after a dicker with an old Jew who dealt in many curious things."

The face of the rubber-dealer had become white.

"I know more than this," resumed the man.

"Why don't you go on, then?"

"I thought you were expecting a business caller who would take up your time, and I don't want to prevent him from transacting his business, which may be as important as mine. What are you going to do with my proposition?"

"I thought I had answered you."

"Nothing, eh?"

Clark Gummage answered with a cold nod.

"All right," replied the man, rising and picking up the hat he had deposited on one end of the desk. "You want notoriety, I see. Well, by the eternal, you shall have it—perhaps more than you bargained for!"

Gummage pushed back his chair, and looking the man in the eye, got up and faced him.

"Won't you take less?" he asked.

"Not a dollar under ten thousand."

The hand of the merchant dived into one of the pigeon-holes.

"Show this man out, Mr. Smithson."

The presence of a third party was not expected by the blackmailer; he had not heard the door open and Gummage's command was so unexpected that, thrown off his guard, he turned half-way round.

There was no man there, and the next instant he realized the full meaning of the stratagem.

Clark Gummage had sprung forward and caught the stranger's wrist; he was pulling him toward the desk, while at the same time his other hand held aloft a singular-looking weapon—an arrow-head, as sharp as a needle, and but two inches long.

The eyes of the blackmailer fell instantly upon the barb.

"You won't take less than ten thousand eh?" exclaimed Gummage. "I can get off easier than that," and he looked at the arrow-head. One prick of this little weapon, and you will never start a ranch in the West nor elsewhere."

The stranger drew back almost the length of Gummage's arm, and Len at the crack above saw that he was mustering his powers.

All of a sudden the foremost foot of the man flew up, and striking the merchant's arm, broke his grip and sent him back to the wall with a howl of pain.

The arrow-head fell to the floor and stuck upright in the matting that covered it.

"When you beat Byrd Davidge you beat his Satanic Majesty!" laughed the fellow, crossing the space which separated him from the thunderstruck Gummage. "This is a game at which two can play and afford a good deal of amusement for one another. Sit down at that desk."

Gummage did not stir. The hand of the man fell heavily upon his shoulder, and the next second he was dragged to his chair and dumped into it.

"The check and be quick about it!" continued Davidge. "Make it out for ten thousand, payable to Byrd Davidge, or bearer. I make no promises. If the ranch proves a failure we may want another start."

Drops of sweat stood out on the pale forehead of the rubber dealer of Philadelphia; his hand trembled when it took up the pen and pulled his check-book from a pigeon-hole.

"You'll lose in the end," he said, looking up into the face that almost touched his shoulder.

"That's our business," grinned the other one. "Ah, thanks," and the brown hand came down like the talons of an eagle and picked up the check.

"Good-by," followed this action. "We'll see you later if we need another raise. Do just what you please, Mr. Gummage; but remember that me and my pard are ready to play a lone hand against the Cormorant League; quite ready whenever you start the game."

Not a word from Clark Gummage—only a terrible look which would have killed if it had been a poisoned arrow.

The door opened and shut and he was alone once more. Len saw him pick up the arrow-head and hide it, then he grasped a green rope hanging along the wall, and pulled it smartly.

In another minute the door opened, and the head of Noah Smithson appeared.

"I paid you yesterday to date, Mr. Smithson?" said Gummage.

"Yes, sir," answered the old man.

"Then we are quits. You are no longer in my employ. Get out of the store, straight. Wait, I'll see you to the door. Keep out of my way. I think you understand. Don't question me. I am in authority here."

The sentences followed each other like a succession of pistol-shots, and Gummage and Old Noah went out.

With their disappearance, Len, the young ferret, sprung to his feet.

"Here is a pretty kettle of soup," cried he. "Old Noah can't come back to let me out. I am in a trap, and this is a room which isn't visited once in a month. I've seen and heard a good deal, and I may have signed my own death-warrant."

CHAPTER XII.

THE TRAP THAT CAUGHT OLD NOAH.

THERE was nothing in the room in which Quaker City Len was imprisoned but a lot of pasteboard boxes. It was on the second floor of the building, and, as the boy had said, was hardly ever visited by the employees. Gummage himself never came near the place.

Old Noah had the key but he had been dismissed and would not be allowed near the store, and Len felt very blue when he looked the situation in the face.

He wanted now to communicate with Porterhouse and Carlton Crisp, for he had seen and heard a good deal, and had obtained some important information against the Cormorant League. There was no longer any doubt in his mind as to the position Clark Gummage held in the Order: the boy ferret believed him to be the ringleader of the whole plot against Porterhouse and Crisp, and he feared that Noah would be watched, if not drawn into danger.

The day passed wearily enough for the boy in the little room. He could watch the rubber-dealer through the hole in the ceiling, and this he did till he grew tired of the sport. He saw the man write several letters and then go away, after putting the arrow-head in his pocket, and then he went to the window and looked down into the street.

He wondered what had become of Noah and Porterhouse. What would his friend Dora say when she heard of his predicament? Would she try to rescue him, and what could she do?

Meantime old Noah had gone home. He was no longer in Clark Gummage's employ, but this did not worry him.

He had made and saved some money, and there was no immediate danger of the wolf approaching the door.

Dora met him in their little room and soon divined by his face that something unusual had happened.

"I've got my walking papers, like Len," said the old man, smiling as he took a seat. "Clark Gummage and I are two from now on."

"What has happened?"

Noah up and told all, ending with a forced laugh at Len's situation.

"The boy will have to stay there for a season," said he. "It isn't a very nice place, plenty of rats, I judge; but he will pant to be out and at work. I'd like to know just what he overheard, and I would have known if Gummage hadn't conducted me to the door just as if he suspected that I had somebody in hiding whom I would like to get out of the box. The man who walked out of the store just ahead of me looked like he had won a victory. I guess he made his point with Gummage, whatever it was. Len would know, but—"

The old man stopped and looked at Dora, smiling again.

"Is Mr. Redding still connected with the store?" asked the girl.

"Yes. He is still head bookkeeper."

"Where does he live?"

"He boards at No. — Race, but last week he was talking about moving, and he may not be at the old place now."

Dora said nothing in reply, and Noah did not ask her why she had asked so suddenly about the bookkeeper, for whom, on several occasions, she had expressed a dislike.

"I'm afraid we've got to let Len occupy the trap," said Noah. "I don't carry the store keys any more, and I don't know to whom they have been given, probably to Pierson, though; and we were never friends."

Then the old man went out and Dora was alone.

Noah Smithson went down-town, and turned up at a hotel where he was totally unknown. At the desk he inquired for Neil Porterhouse, and was told that the Southerner had paid his bill and was no longer a guest of the establishment.

"That's queer," mused the discharged clerk, turning slowly from the counter. "I don't understand it. It can't be that he has given up the fight against the Cormorants. No, I won't believe that he has."

At the first corner which he struck after quitting the hotel, Noah was accosted by a boy who asked him if his name was Smithson.

"That's me," said the old clerk, and the youngster drew a piece of paper from his dirty pocket and handed it to Noah.

"Who gave you this?" asked Noah as he unfolded the slip.

"A gentleman who wrote it on his pocketbook and told me to feller you and deliver it if your name was Smithson. I've been paid for the job," and the boy disappeared.

Old Noah adjusted his spectacles and read as follows:

"MR. SMITHSON:—I learn that you are out of employment. If you want a paying job, and a permanent one besides, please call at No. — Y— street, between the hours of 6 and 10 P. M. to-day. We want a good man, and especially one who knows something about Mr. Clark Gummage, the rubber-merchant, and your former employer.

"G. P. M.,
For the Company."

Noah read this strange letter over twice, and then put it in his pocket.

There was a mystery about the whole thing, and especially about the last lines. Why did the writer of the letter want a man who knew something about Clark Gummage? Was he, too, fighting the man supposed to be at the head of the Cormorant League, and was he (Noah) expected to tell all he knew about the rubber-dealer?

The old clerk looked at his watch.

"I'll investigate," said he to himself. "There might be something in this matter for us. I want to know several things. What has become of Ralph Mennessee, the missing night-watchman, who was looking after the house near Fairmount Park? The poor wife is nearly distracted over him. Then, what are the members of the League up to at their secret meetings? And did one of their number kill and rob Neil Porterhouse's father in Louisiana?"

He concluded to investigate the letter without telling Dora of his intention, and when the hour of seven came, he wended his way to Y— street.

Nobody seemed to be in sight when old Noah rung the bell, and in a moment the door opened and admitted him.

He stood face to face with a young man whose countenance looked very youthful, even in the uncertain light of the hall, and in response to his inquiry for "G. P. M." Noah was conducted up-stairs and shown into a room which was empty at the time.

Left to himself, the old clerk took in his surroundings and found that he was in an apartment which did not look very much like a business office. There was a small table in one corner, and near by a big, rather uncomfortable-looking arm-chair.

Noah was studying these things, when the door opened softly and a man came in.

Dark-eyed, tall, smoothly-shaven, and with the look of a cunning rascal was this person, and Noah in a moment wished himself home with Dora, but it was now too late to get away till the man should let him out.

"Ah, you are here, I see?" said the man, looking at Noah with the smile of a cool, calculating demon. "I thought our letter would pick you up. You know Mr. Clark Gummage?"

"I ought to; I have been in his employ, but am out of it now, as you seem to know."

"Yes, yes, we are aware of this fact, but we won't discuss it here. Have you the papers on your person?"

Old Noah started.

"The papers?" he asked.

"Yes, those you took home a short time ago."

Everything seemed to burst upon him in a flash. The man wanted the papers which he had rescued from the thief on the street—an incident detailed in a previous chapter.

"I don't carry them with me," said Noah.

"You leave them with the girl, then?"

The old man was silent.

"I have said that I don't carry them with me, and that ought to be enough."

"But it isn't, Mr. Smithson," coolly answered the other, complacently crossing his legs. "You have been summoned to this house for the purpose of placing those papers in our hands. If you haven't them with you you will please go to that table and write an order for them. They are wanted."

"By whom?" demanded the old man.

"Never mind that," was the reply. "Those papers are, first, a record of my marriage; they concern no people but Dora and I."

"You may think so, but we want 'em," was the gruff rejoinder. "You will find the writing materials on the table."

Noah Smithson did not move.

"Aren't you going to give us the order?" suddenly cried the man opposite him.

"I am not."

The next instant the stranger struck the floor with his heavy heel.

"Here I am, Sandos," said a voice as the door flew open and a man made his appearance.

Old Noah almost sprung from his chair, for he was the very man from whom he had rescued the precious papers.

"Won't he give 'em up?" queried the new-comer, looking first at the man called Sandos and then at Noah.

"That's what he says."

"Won't you, eh?" and the speaker leaned forward till his dark, repulsive face almost touched the old clerk's.

"I'll die first," was the quick reply.

A signal passed between the two men and both threw themselves upon Noah who was forced back to the wall where he was choked till he was black in the face despite his struggles. The old man had the muscles of a lion, but the twain were too much for him, and in a short time he was completely in the men's power.

Almost unconscious, he was dragged to the armchair and made fast in it with cords and left there till he came back to life, as it were, when he was again asked to give the required order.

"You can't have it," said Noah with his old resolution.

"Oh, we can rob the nest," laughed one of the men.

"It won't do you any good."

"What, ain't the papers there?"

"They're not there," triumphantly answered Noah.

The fellow called Sandos came close to him and bent forward till their noses nearly met.

"You've taken 'em to a Trust Company, eh?" he cried. "By Jove, if you don't tell us where they are we'll leave you to shrivel up in this house like a mummy in an Egyptian tomb. We don't care so much about the paper which records your marriage, but we want another one that's in the lot. Your name hasn't always been Noah Smithson, not by a long shot. Give us the order now."

"Never. I don't intend to rob Dora of her rights."

Both men laughed, but stopped suddenly.

"You don't, eh?" cried one. "You want to perish here and leave the girl without a protector? Very well. You won't see her again soon, if ever."

"And you of the Cormorant League won't win this game in the end, either. I may perish here, as you say, but there is a hunter on your trail who will see that justice is done and the guilty punished. Go ahead and reap the whirlwind."

The men looked at stubborn old Noah, then at one another, and the following moment he was the only occupant of the little room.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHAT DORA DID.

DORA waited all day for old Noah's return, but he came not.

As the shades of evening deepened she grew uneasy, and finally became actually afraid. Something had happened; an accident of some kind had overtaken the old man as dear to her as a father, and locking the door at last, she went down upon the street in search of him.

But she might as well have looked for a needle in the gutter, for not a trace of Noah was obtainable, and she came back to the deserted home with a shadow on her track.

"He may come back while I'm away," said the girl to herself. "I shall go and see Mr. Redding, though I don't like him. Len might suggest something about Noah, but he is locked up in the store and can't get out until somebody liberates him. That is what I am going to try to do with Mr. Redding's help."

She made her way to Arch street by the nearest cut and knocked at a certain door. Here she made inquiry for Mr. Willis Redding, the head bookkeeper of the house of Gummage & Blynn, but was told that the young man had changed his quarters within the last week and was to be found on another street, nearly a mile away.

Dora started off again with the same shadow at her heels, and found the new house. Here she was more successful, for she was told that the accountant was in his room.

"I'll go up," said Dora. "He knows me," and she

ascended the stair, and rapped on a small door already ajar.

Willis Redding was a young man of twenty-four, not at all handsome, nor the owner of a good figure, but he thought himself a power among the softer sex, and had on several occasions tried to get into the good graces of the old clerk's *protegee*; but Dora had repelled him in a manner that had made his cheeks tingle.

He was sitting at a round table upon which he had elevated both feet, and was sending clouds of not very fragrant smoke above his head, and when he realized who his caller was he almost sprung to his feet.

"Pardon my late call, Mr. Redding," said Dora; "but do you carry the key to the store?"

"I have it sometimes," was the reply. "I go there o' nights and go over the books when we have been pushed during the day. What can I do for you?"

Dora did not like to tell him that Len was a prisoner in the establishment because there was not the best of feeling between the two, but there seemed no way of getting out of it.

"Locked up in the little waste room, is he?" grinned Willis Redding. "I dare say he's had a nice time with the rats, and without anything to eat unless he caught a Norway or two and bolted them raw. How came he in that room? He was discharged by Mr. Gummage, and it looks rather suspicious to hear of him in the store after what has happened."

"He is there at all events and must get out," rejoined Dora, resolutely.

"Gummage ought to know of it first."

Dora instantly lost color.

"If you want me to think anything of you, Willis Redding, he must not hear of it," she exclaimed, moving toward the bookkeeper. "I have resolved to trust you with a secret, and if you betray me you shall forfeit my friendship. Len did not get into the trap to steal anything. He did not intend to remain long in the waste room, but the unexpected occurred, and he was locked in."

"Did your—er—did Noah know it?"

"He knew of his presence in the room, but he was discharged so abruptly that he could not release Len."

"I see," drawled Willis Redding. "What if I should not have the key to-night?"

"But you have it!" cried the girl.

"You seem to know a good deal."

"I can see some things. The key is yonder on the bureau. If you will let me have it half an hour I will release Len myself and you need not quit this house."

"I can't do that. I can't let the key get out of my clutches."

"Then come along and open the door."

"Sit down here and wait till I come back."

Dora looked at him and smiled, shaking her head at the same time.

"I wouldn't trust you out of my sight, Willis Redding," she muttered. "You're as slippery as an eel, and if you could you would send the occupant of the trap to the station to answer a charge of burglary. No, you go with me, or not at all."

The young bookkeeper saw that he was dealing with a resolute girl and saying at last that he guessed he would have to help her, he picked up the key and his hat and bade her follow him.

Down at the foot of the stair but on the sidewalk stood the same figure which had shadowed Dora from her own home. The moment the watcher saw her accompanied by Willis Redding he let go a long whistle and took after the pair.

Willis led Dora straight to the store and unlocked the door. The moment it was opened the girl slipped into the dark room and waited.

The young bookkeeper did not strike a light, but found the staircase without it and led the way to the floor above.

"Here we are," said he in a whisper, slipping the key into the lock of the waste room. "I half-believe he's not here for I don't hear a sound."

In a moment the door was opened and Dora craned her head forward.

"Len?" she called. "Len, are you here?"

There was no answer.

"I told you so," said Willis Redding. "Wait till I strike a match."

He drew a lucifer across the wall and as the little flame leaped into being both he and Dora leaned forward with anxious faces.

The room was empty!

"He might have escaped by the windows if he had a rope," resumed the bookkeeper, crossing the room. "But no, the windows are fastened on the inside. Somebody came and let him out."

"But who?" queried Dora, and the young man shook his head.

"Does Mr. Gummage come to the store often after quitting it for the day?" she suddenly inquired.

"Not often."

"But sometimes?"

"Yes, sometimes, but he would have no business in this room. I tell you, Len was let out, but by whom is beyond my ken. Let's go back now, if you are ready."

Yes, Dora was ready, for she could do nothing there, and they left the building together, but not until she had exacted from Redding a solemn promise that he would not say anything of their visit to Clark Gummage, but even then she did not know whether she could trust the young man or not.

The shadower who had followed them to the store followed them back to Willis Redding's lodgings, at the door of which Dora bade the bookkeeper good-night and turned homeward.

Then the shadower went in another direction and

pulled up at a well-to-do house which he entered with a pass-key, and passing up a flight of steps, entered a room where he was greeted by a man who was seated at a table.

"I've just been witnessing some strange proceedings," said the trailer, dropping into a chair and helping himself to a cigar from a box on the table. "I've just seen your store opened."

"My store?" exclaimed the other, starting. "Yes. I followed the burglars to and from the store, but they didn't take anything away."

"Did you know them?" "It was my business to do so. The pair were your bookkeeper and old Noah's girl."

Clark Gummage—the man at the table was the rubber-dealer—could not suppress a cry of astonishment.

"What did they do?" he asked.

"They went to the waste room over your office; there the young man struck a light and examined the windows. I don't think they found what they were looking for."

"Of course they didn't," smiled Gummage. "It's pretty hard to get ahead of old foxes," and the merchant laughed till he was satisfied.

"See here," said he to his caller. "I want you to go out to the nest and see that everything is all right there. I have set Martyn on the track of the man from the South. We are going to draw the lines and finish the whole game. I'm tired of being trailed and watched by everybody. Old Noah is safe, you say? To-morrow we will know where the papers are, and I know what sort of hand the old man writes. I've got lots of samples at the store, and we can fix up a document to suit us. Do you think the girl Dora suspects?"

"That she is—"

"No, that somebody let the boy out."

"She is liable to think so," answered the man, rising.

"Well, I don't care much," grinned Gummage. "We have the whole lot in our talons, with the exception of Davidge and his partner; and we can manage them. Go to the house and see that Mona is still there. She saw something in the yard—last night I believe it was—but she won't tell what it was."

"Is that woman going back on the League?"

"She dare not!" said Gummage, through his teeth. "I tell you we have her in the net. She would like to quit the game, but she dare not, I tell you."

He got up and began to walk the floor, with his hands shut hard.

"If I thought she would betray us, Sandos," he suddenly cried. "If I even dreamt of such a thing, I'd make her occupy that cage through all time. She saw a spy in the yard—that's what she saw."

"Do you think Neil Porterhouse would know her?"

"There's no telling; but I don't want to take the risk."

"What if he was the man she saw in the yard?"

Clark Gummage made no reply, but came back to the chair at the table, and from it looked like a madman at the man who had offered the suggestion.

"We are here to win. The stakes are worth playing for. The Cormorants must let nothing slip through their talons. But go, Sandos—go to the nest and see that everything is right there," and the man called Sandos, going out, left the head of the League alone.

CHAPTER XIV.

BACK TO THE NEST OF CORMORANTS

THE mysterious vanishment of Quaker City Len from the room above Clark Gummage's office troubled Dora very much. In addition to this, she could hear of nothing that promised to tell her of Noah's whereabouts, and the poor girl did not know what to do.

When she got away from Willis Redding, the young clerk, she went home, but did not get to see her foster-father. Old Noah had not returned.

"I will go and see Carlton Crisp, the blind man, with whom Len boards. I have never seen him, but Len has told me much about him. I believe he was a detective when he lost his sight, and he may tell me what to do."

Once more Dora went out upon the street, and in course of time rapped gently at the blind man's door. A pleasant "come in" was the response.

When Dora opened the door and saw a man seated at a table, with a dim light burning over his head, she stopped short and looked at him.

"Who is there?" asked Crisp.

"It is Len's friend, Dora," said the girl, going forward, and Crisp, turning, though he saw her not, placed his hand in hers.

"I already know you," said he. "Len has told me much about you, and I am glad you have come. Where is the boy?"

Dora started. The blind detective, then, knew nothing of the young ferret's whereabouts!

"I have come to you for assistance," continued Dora. "It is a very strange story."

"About Len?"

"Yes."

"Tell me, child."

Thereupon Dora told him all she knew, saying, in closing, that Noah, too, was strangely absent, and that she feared something dire had overtaken both.

When she had finished Carlton Crisp put his face between his arms on the table and was silent for some time.

"I used to be good at thinking mysteries out," said he. "The question that puzzles you now is: Who let Len out and what has become of him?"

"That is it, sir."

"I don't think Noah ventured back to the store, for when he quit Clark Gummage's employ he was obliged to give up the key. When you got to the room it was untenanted, eh? Somebody came and liberated the boy. I don't want to frighten you, child, but I believe Len is still in a trap."

Dora could not keep down a cry.

"In the hands of the League, you mean?" she exclaimed.

"I'm afraid so; but—"

The sentence was cut short by a step in the hall, and Crisp turned his sightless eyes toward the door.

"If Porterhouse would but drop in now," he said, "we might pick up a clew."

At that moment the door opened and Dora saw a tall, good-looking man walk into the room.

"The very man," cried Carlton Crisp, a smile overspreading his face. "Here, Neil, you are just in time."

It was Porterhouse the Southerner, sure enough, and he came forward and touched the blind man's arm.

"Who have we here?" he asked looking at Dora.

"I am Len's friend Dora—the adopted child of Noah Smithson," spoke the girl for herself.

Porterhouse seemed to start.

"So you are Dora?" said he still eying her. "Do you resemble your mother, child?"

"That's a strange question, seeing that I can tell you nothing about her," was the reply. "My mother I never saw her picture even. Old Noah never told me anything about her, but sometimes I have caught him looking at a picture which he keeps among his treasures."

"So, so," smiled Porterhouse, and the hand of Crisp called him from the subject of Dora's parentage.

"Dora will tell you the story she has just told me. I want you to hear it. Go ahead, girl."

Neil Porterhouse listened to every word that fell from the girl's tongue, now and then glancing at Crisp during the narrative, but not interrupting the fair narrator to the end.

"What do you think?" questioned Crisp, facing Porterhouse. "Don't you think Len still in the trap?"

"To be sure he is, and old Noah, too."

"Then, both are in danger," exclaimed Dora. "But why would they want to entrap Noah?"

"Ah, you don't know the workings of the Cormorants," smiled the man from the South. "The League is just now clearing its way; the game must be ended before long, and they don't intend to let anything stop them."

"Would they do murder?"

"My child, they will do anything," answered Porterhouse. "What they have done they will do again. Desperate men will commit desperate crimes."

The face of Dora was white and full of solicitude. Porterhouse fell to questioning her about Noah's disappearance, but she could not tell him much. She knew that the papers which the old man had rescued from the robbers had been placed in the safe of a Trust Company, and they were secure.

"Safe if they are not taken away by an order of some kind," said the Southerner.

"But he won't give any such order: the papers are too precious for that," cried the girl.

"Orders are easily obtained nowadays," rejoined the tall man. "Do you know where the papers are?"

Dora knew but she hesitated. She had never met Porterhouse before and she did not like to betray one of old Noah's secrets.

"I am Noah's friend now more than ever," remarked Porterhouse, coming to her rescue. "I am fighting the Cormorant League to the death. I shall crush it with the assistance of Len Dalray and, I hope, with old Noah's aid, too."

"You can tell him where the papers are, if you know, child," put in Crisp, and then Dora surrendered her secret.

"They are in the safes of the Columbian Trust Company."

"Thanks," said Porterhouse. "Now, when are you going home?"

"I should be there now," said Dora.

Five minutes later old Noah's *protegee*, accompanied by the tall Southerner, was on her way home, and when she opened the door and found the little room still unoccupied by Noah, she turned a pale face toward her companion.

"I've picked up something new to-night," muttered Porterhouse, when he had said good-night and left the room. "The papers are safe if the men who sprung the trap on old Noah don't get an order for them, and land them in their net early to-morrow. Let me see. There is just where the danger lies. Neil Porterhouse, there is a good deal of important work between now and morning for you."

He walked rapidly back to his hotel, and went direct to his room.

Sitting down at the table he drew writing materials before him, and after several attempts, the first few did not please him, he produced the following.

"To the Columbian Trust Co.:-

"Please deliver to the bearer the package which I left in your charge. He will pay expenses and give a receipt in my name."

Having written this to his satisfaction, Porterhouse went out again and turned up beyond the Girard Avenue Bridge, or in the vicinity of the house where he had had his adventure with the woman who discovered him crouched in the yard under the window.

Once more he had come back to the scene of his former exploit, and now he moved along like a shadow with few people to see him, for the hour

was late, and the good citizens of the Quaker City were asleep.

Porterhouse approached the house and found it quite dark so far as exterior looks were concerned, and in a short time he was playing spy again.

It was not long before he discovered that the building was inhabited, for he saw a light in one of the upper windows. It looked very like a signal to the Southern r., and he was watching it closely when he heard the sound of wheels.

Turning his head toward the road, he soon caught sight of a vehicle, and in a minute one drew up a short distance from the house. It was a closed vehicle, but Porterhouse saw a man alight and come toward him.

"A Cormorant is coming back to the nest," thought the Southerner.

"I shall have a glimpse of him when he passes that bit of light thrown from the blind by the lamp inside, and his looks will determine my course of action."

Nearer and nearer came the man, while the vehicle remained stationary in the road.

Sheltered by a tree which stood near, Porterhouse kept his eyes on the night-bird, and the moment he crossed the line of light, he gave a quick start.

He had just looked upon the figure of Clark Gummage, the rubber-dealer!

"I ought to nail him at the throat," flashed through Porterhouse's mind. "I now know that he is at the head of the Cormorants, but I was almost sure of it before. Ah, in he goes!"

The door had opened and shut for the man thus discovered, and the Southerner was staring at the house.

All at once a loud cry rung in his ears.

He started from his post and ran toward the door. "Why do you let him make a noise like that?" he heard a voice on the inside say.

"He's out of his head, sir, and has been more or less ever since he came here."

"Why, then, don't you choke him into silence?"

"I've done enough as it is. Clark Gummage, I'm tired of this life, and I want you to let me go."

The last speaker was a woman, as Porterhouse could tell by the voice; and her words were followed by a coarse, derisive laugh.

CHAPTER XV.

WIDE-AWAKE FINDS A MISSING LINK.

It might have been worth the life of the man from the South to have entered that house at that particular time.

His blood was hot, and he felt like kicking in the door and rushing to the rescue of the person who had given utterance to the cry that had thrilled him; but he knew the odds were against him, and he wisely refrained from making the attempt.

The laugh which followed the woman's appeal seemed to have silenced her, for Porterhouse did not hear of her again.

"Is Len in there?" he asked himself. "Was he not taken from the room above the private office and conveyed to this nest by the League I am fighting? I will see you later, Clark Gummage," and in another moment the Southerner had withdrawn, and just in time, too, for he had barely left the door when it was opened and a man came out.

Porterhouse did not see this person, but he heard the vehicle moving off, and soon it was hurrying toward the city.

While it is pushing along under the myriad lights of the Quaker City let us do what Porterhouse wisely refrained from doing—enter the Cormorant nest and see who occupied it.

The house stood some distance from its neighbors, and looked forbidding enough when the night was dark. The windows were furnished with closed shutters and there were curtains inside.

Standing in the hall as if listening to the footsteps of the man who came out to ride off in the rig, was a woman of middle age, if looks are an indication.

She was not in the best of humor, for her eyes flashed and she was biting her lip.

"He wouldn't let me go, and I am still in the clutches of the cabal," she said, hotly. "I asked to be let off—even promising secrecy—but he laughed at me, and said I should not go. I wonder what has become of the man I saw crouching in the yard the other night? They seem to be afraid of some one. Is it of him? If I go away now I will be watched; they will shadow me, and I would not have a moment's peace. But I can't be their tool much longer. It is killing me. Why did I become their slave in the first place? One of those mad steps which cannot be recalled!"

She would have been a handsome woman but for the dark rings under her eyes, and when she went back she clinched her hands and shut the door madly after her.

Passing through the room which she entered, she opened a door set in the wall and, descending several steps, opened another, which admitted her to a small apartment without windows.

A lamp was set in a frame which was fastened to the wall, and its light, not very strong, showed her the figure of a boy stretched on a pallet in one corner.

The form was raised a little at sight of the woman, and a pair of bright, inquisitive eyes were fixed upon her.

As she crossed the room the boy got upon his feet and stood before her.

It was Wide-Awake Len.

"Did he go off again?" asked the young ferret.

"Who?"

"Why, Clark Gummage, the sleek rascal who is playing a sly hand for big stakes," was the quick rejoinder.

"How do you know he was here?"

"I heard him. You don't think I've been his clerk for nothing? I would know his voice among a thousand."

The woman looked at Len half a minute before she spoke again.

"We ought to be friends," said she slowly.

"But I guess we can't as long as you serve your present masters."

"Don't be too hard on me. You don't know why I am in their employ. Sometimes a slave's heart isn't in his work."

"That's a fact."

"I don't want to be thought as bad as I appear."

"Then why don't you get out of the trap? You don't have to serve the Cormorants, do you?"

"I am in their clutches."

"But you seem satisfied, for they aren't here all the time, and this house is beyond the bridge. I don't see what's to keep you here, unless you are willing to stay."

The woman seemed to swallow hard, to choke, as it were.

"There's another man somewhere in this house," continued Len.

The guardian of the Nest started.

"Who told you?"

"Never mind that. I know that I am not the only fly in the Cormorants' snare."

"Who is the other one?"

"If I were to guess I'd call him Ralph Menessee. His poor wife is distracted over his absence. He was finding out too much poking his nose into other people's business, as it were. He was watching the house when picked up by the Cormorants' talons. Are you going to let his wife die of grief?"

There was no answer.

"You might tell me your story," resumed Len. "I don't want to drag any secret from you, but it would be in the interests of justice. Why not tell me? We are alone."

"I am watched at all times," said the woman with a shiver. "I am under suspicion. They know that I want to get out of the talons of the merciless birds of blood, and the moment I tell what I know that moment will I be doomed. Tell you my story? Why, I would have to go back a good many years. No, no; don't ask me to do that."

"Then, you want the League to win; you want it to crush Porterhouse."

At sound of the Southerner's name the woman came forward with a suddenly colorless face, and seemed to devour Len Dalray with her dark eyes.

"Where is Neil Porterhouse?" she cried.

"Nearer than you think."

"In this city?"

"He is in this city."

"Then he was the man I saw in the yard."

"Perhaps. Do you want the League to win the game against him? Do you want to see him follow his father who was killed in his own house by the deadly arrow of the Kaflirs?"

"Who told you about the poisoned arrow-head?"

"You forget that I have been playing detective against the Cormorants, and in the cause of Porterhouse and the man who was blinded because he was hot on the trail of the very men whom you now serve. I ought to know something."

"Where is this man Porterhouse?" asked the woman at last; she had not spoken for some time after the boy ferret's reply.

"I could lay hands on him in twenty minutes if I were out."

"And you would tell him about me?"

"If you say so, yes."

"Did Porterhouse tell you about the crime?"

"I have the whole story from his own lips; besides, I heard it from Carlton Crisp before Porterhouse came to this city."

"Did either of them mention—"

The woman paused and seemed afraid to go on. She acted like a person who was about to betray a well kept secret; but who shrank from the betrayal with a shudder.

Len, looking at her all the time, waited for her to go on.

"Tell me," she suddenly cried, springing forward and catching his shoulder. "Tell me, did either of those men—Porterhouse in particular—mention Myra his father's servant?"

"The story is not complete without a mention of her," answered the young shadow.

"Gods, that is too true," was the retort. "The terrible tale would lack something if they were to leave her out. What did they say of her? They hate her, I suppose?"

"You could not expect Porterhouse to think well of the maid who disappeared the night of the crime, as if her hand was in it."

"Don't say that," exclaimed the woman. "Don't make things worse than they are. They are bad enough, Heaven knows. So, Neil Porterhouse hates Myra? Would he like to find her?"

"You may not have heard that the maid is dead," said the boy. "A year after the tragedy Porterhouse learned that the maid was killed in a railroad accident."

"Ah, he heard that did he! Does he believe it?"

"It has never been contradicted."

"Do you believe it, boy?"

"No, I don't," the young shadow answered boldly. "Why should I when Myra the maid stands before me now."

The woman receded from Len with a quick nervous cry, but the next moment she had recovered and was looking down into his face.

"You'd tell Porterhouse, wouldn't you?" she cried.

"Maybe I would. Don't you think he takes an interest in you?"

"He ought to. I could tell him something. I

could make bright some of the dark places; but he might not believe me in every instance."

"Why don't you tell him?"

"The League," was the reply, accompanied by ano her shudder. "It would be worth my life to turn against it now, it is so powerful. I dare not tell what I know. Why, if I should appear before Porterhouse, it would be like one having risen from the dead. I throw off my mask since you have penetrated it. I am Myra, the maid. I am the woman who holds the secret of that double crime which took place in the Louisiana home years ago. Without me all cannot be made bright; the hand that committed it cannot be brought to justice; I don't care what Porterhouse and his trailers do. I must speak before the Cormorants cease to exist."

For a moment Myra stood before Len, and then, falling back suddenly as if a sound had startled her, she ran to the door and listened.

"Go back to your pallet," she whispered, looking at Len, and at the same time holding one finger to her lips. "The future may not be as dark as it looks. Trust a traitress—if you can, boy," and gliding from the chamber, Myra closed and locked the door and Len, the ferret, was alone once more.

"Everything seems to depend on that woman now," said he. "She is the long lost accomplice of the double crime which Porterhouse is trying to avenge."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE GOLDEN HOOK.

ONCE more Mr. Clark Gummage sat in his private office, the scene of several encounters which the reader has witnessed in the course of our story.

It was early morning and he evidently expected no visitors at that hour, for he was immersed in business, so that when the man who had succeeded old Noah poked his head in at the door and told him that a caller would like to see him he started and looking up, asked what sort of a man he was.

"He is tall and slim, sir," answered the new man.

"Any beard?"

"A perfectly smooth face."

Gummage thought a moment and then gave orders for the man to be admitted.

Before his caller came in however he put away several documents that lay on the desk-lid, and then looked anxiously toward the door.

Presently there came a step from toward the store and the following second he was looking up in o' the face of a man who appeared to be an entire stranger to him.

A spasm of sudden fear seemed to whiten Gummage's cheeks, for an instant, as if he thought the caller had come with some evil intent, but he recovered shortly and smiled.

One thing he was sure of. The man was not Byrd Davidge, the cool scoundrel who had forced from the check for ten thousand, but he might be the fellow's partner.

"I don't want to take up too much of your precious time," said the merchant's caller, in a stately manner which bespoke an oily tongue. "My name for the present, is Jackson Havens; don't know as you ever heard it before."

"Never had that pleasure," answered the rubber-merchant.

"I have called to talk about a matter which may concern both of us."

"Ah, a mutual affair, then?"

"Just so. Mr. Gummage, do you know anything about a woman named Myra Moss?"

It was with the greatest effort that the merchant kept himself from leaping out of his chair.

The name seemed to go through him like a bullet.

"Do I know a woman named Myra Moss?" he repeated, almost unconscious that the eyes of the man at his elbow were looking at him through a mass of black lashes. "I am sorry to inform you that the name and its possessor are entirely unknown to me."

That this was a deliberate falsehood almost any one could have told by watching the man while he spoke. He told by his looks the very opposite of what he said, and the smile that came unbidden to the lips of Jackson Havens denoted a disbelief of the answer he had received.

"Ah, you do not know her? I might freshen your memory," said Havens. "Myra Moss once lived in the South, in Louisiana, I believe. I am almost sure that you know something about her, for she would not have spoken your name by accident."

"When did she do so?"

"Not very lately to be sure," was the reply; "but late enough to keep it from slipping from my mind. Are you sure you never knew a woman of the name I have mentioned?"

Clark Gummage appeared to reflect by way of refreshing his memory, when, in fact, he was scheming how to meet the suspicions of the man who had invaded his sanctum.

"I seem to recollect the name, now that you have spaken it," said he. "It comes to me like the shape of a dream person. I can barely recollect it; but perhaps you might enlighten me further."

He wanted to draw the man out—to see what he had in reserve and then he would know how to meet him.

"Myra Moss lived in the family of a planter named Porterhouse. She disappeared very suddenly after a crime which resulted in the death of Porterhouse senior, though I believe no suspicion was ever directed against the girl. She was above doing anything wicked, though she may have been a little culpable in not locking the doors that particular night, which was an oversight on her part."

"Probably," said Gummage, hardly knowing what he was saying. "I have found that servants

are not at all times trustworthy. But why do you come to me with inquiries concerning Myra Moss?"

"You have been to England and I have understood that she went across the water after the murder. If she had stayed there she might have heard of something to her advantage."

"In what way?"

"In the shape of a legacy."

"A legacy for Myra Moss?"

"Yes. I hunt up heirs to English estates. Myra Moss came from England, and I believe went back there to live after the crime of the plantation, though I cannot prove it."

"I'm always glad to hear of any one's good fortune," said Clark Gummage. "If I recollect right, the Moss woman was tall and rather good looking. Seems to me I once saw her at the home of Mr. Porterhouse. I used to travel over a portion of the South and my business took me frequently among the planters of Louisiana."

"Yes, the Moss woman was tall, as you say, and not bad looking. The legacy would come quite good to her, and I wouldn't mind finding her, for my commission would put a neat sum in my pockets, besides getting a very vexatious case off my hands."

"Is the legacy considerable?" queried Gummage.

"Enough for any one to live on. I think her share would reach ten thousand pounds."

"Fifty thousand dollars," mused the rubber-dealer aloud.

"Just about, and a snug sum, as you will see. If you can't give me any information about the Moss woman I must look elsewhere, and I'm afraid my hunt will be a wild goose chase which may send me back to England."

Mr. Havens had risen and was standing beside the desk, holding his hat in his hand.

"Where are you to be found, Mr. Havens?" asked Gummage.

"For the present I am stopping at a private boarding-house, 878 —th street."

The rubber-merchant made a mental note of the address.

"I might run across Myra Moss during the next few days," he continued. "We pick up some strange information in the course of trade, and then I have correspondents all over the world, and if I can help you I shall be only too glad to do so."

"Thank you," responded Havens. "I shall appreciate and pay well for any information that will help me unearth Myra Moss. I might state that unless she is found soon she will lose the benefit of the will under which she realizes."

Clark Gummage seemed to gasp for breath, as if the room had suddenly grown close.

"In what time must you find Miss Moss?" he inquired.

"Within the next three days."

"Heavens, that's a very brief time, and I'm afraid you won't succeed."

"That is what worries me. Well, if she loses it won't be my fault, for I've ransacked a big part of the world for her; in fact, she's given me more trouble than all my cases put together. I hope you may run across her. It'll be a nice fee in your pocket, Mr. Gummage."

The next minute Clark Gummage was alone in the little office, but the affairs which Jackson Havens had interrupted now had no charms for him.

His face was flushed with a strange eagerness, and he walked to the window and looked out, as if he would follow the caller up the street.

"Fifty thousand dollars!" he mused aloud. "That's a nest-egg worth looking after. It is ready to drop into my lap, and I needn't share it with anybody. It's all mine, and, besides, if I play my cards well, I can rake in a fee in addition to it. All I have to do is to find Myra Moss, to produce the real woman who has inherited in England, and I think I can do that."

He laughed to himself at the end of his last sentence, and went back to his desk.

"I know where to find Jackson Havens," said he, "and I can put my hand on this estate when I want to. She threatened to quit the coils, but I'd like to see her. Why, she is tighter there than ever, and we don't fear her threats. Let's see. It's better to fall heir to a big estate than to drop into the hands of Porterhouse and the others who are helping him at this time. I can bring her to time with a few words, and the bait of thousands which has been placed in my power will settle the matter."

He locked his desk and went out. The morning was a clear summer one, and the rubber-dealer tripped along as if ten years had been lifted from his shoulders.

Meantime the man called Jackson Havens had vanished, but he did not direct his steps to 878 —th street. On the contrary, he went in the opposite direction after he had taken a few turns from the rubber store, and ran up a certain stairway and into a room where a blind man sat at a front window.

"Back already?" cried the sightless man, turning the moment the heir-hunter entered the room. "You must have received the bluff and been shown to the door."

"Not by a long shot," was the answer, as the speaker came forward and took a chair at the blind man's side. "I have met with the best of success. I have seen Mr. Clark Gummage in his office and had quite a chat with him."

"Without being suspected?"

"He never dreamt of my true character. To him I was just what I represented myself, a lawyer hunting the lost heiress of an English estate. I was looking after Myra Moss, and Gummage fell into the trap without any trouble. I caught my fish with a golden bait. Myra Moss is in this city, and Gummage is going to find her for me, though I more than half suspect where she is, as you know."

"Yes, yes," said Carlton Crisp.

"I told him that she had to be found within three days, and I am sure that my story will bear fruit. Once in my power Myra Moss shall aid me to crush the Cormorants, and we will get even with the infamous League."

"But, Len, the boy ferret, and my young friend?" cried the blind detective.

"Oh, he will turn up all O. K.," was the quick rejoinder.

"The League may have finished him."

"I know enough of him to feel that he has not felt the talons to any great extent. When we have closed in on the Cormorants I am sure the little fox of the Quaker City won't be far off."

"I hope you're right, Porterhouse. I want no one to feel the talons of the League as I have felt them," and the speaker put his hands up to his eyes. "What are you going to do now?"

"I shall go to 878 —th street and wait for the news which Clark Gummage will fetch ere long. I am sure he will come, for I played my cards well this morning, and he swallowed the golden hook, the foolish rascal."

A light laugh ended the Southerner's sentence, and he betook himself away to proceed to the boarding-house named to Clark Gummage, there to play the role of Jackson Havens for the purpose of scoring a victory.

"I will not be able to see the scoundrel swing," said Carlton Crisp, "but I shall rejoice with those who do. Neil Porterhouse is worth his weight in gold."

CHAPTER XVII.

SWORN TO SILENCE.

WIDE-AWAKE LEN waited a long time for the reappearance of the woman who seemed to have charge of the Cormorant nest near the Park.

He was on the eve of believing that she had deserted him for good when the click of the key in the lock told him that she or some one else was coming in, and the following moment the same woman stood before him once more.

"What would you do if I were to let you out?" she asked, coming toward him with a smile.

"You don't think I'd linger about this house, do you?"

"You'd have some cause for doing so, though."

"Ah, do you think so? This is the Cormorants' nest and you know that I am one of those who want to break up the infamous band and see that its members are punished for their past crimes."

"What do you think of me?"

"I have told you already. You are Myra Moss, the missing servant of the Porterhouses. Why don't you come out and tell all you know?"

The woman fell back with a blanched face and stared at the boy.

"I dare not," she said. "You ought to realize my situation."

"I see. You are afraid of the vengeance of the Cormorants. That stands between you and the truth."

There was no response. The woman walked across the room and listened at the door. The boy watched her and wondered what she would do next.

From what he could see she was fighting a great mental battle with herself, and once or twice he thought he saw her tremble as if fear had full possession of her heart.

"You would betray me at once if you were to get out," she said at last turning toward Len.

"Not if I agreed not to."

"Would you keep my hiding-place a secret for, say, ten hours?"

"I would."

"You would not betray me to Porterhouse within that time?"

"Try me."

"I will," answered the woman with determination. "I am going to test the strength of your resolution. Within five minutes you will be clear of this house."

"I will not forget you," replied Len. "I know how to thank those who help me. I was found above Clark Gummage's office and by the rubber-dealer himself through the merest of accidents. He came to the store accidentally and looked into the old waste room, something he had not done in six months. I was there and from the room I came to this place which I know is the nest of the band."

Myra went away again, but soon came back, and Len was conducted from the room. He was taken up-stairs and halted in the back hall-way.

"What about the other man?" asked the boy ferret, looking up into the woman's face.

"I know no other person in this affair," said she.

"I heard his voice in the house a while ago, and then the voice of Clark Gummage."

"Let that go; I can help no one but you."

"Very well," thought the young shadow. "We will help Ralph Mennessie ourselves, for he shall not perish in the trap of the Cormorants. While I am under oath not to reveal Myra Moss's hiding-place to Porterhouse during the next ten hours, I am under no obligations not to rescue the missing watchman, if I can."

He said no more on this subject, but let the woman let him out without further ceremony, and once more he breathed the air of the starry night.

Len Dalray lost no time in getting down to the heart of the city, and the first place he visited was Carlton Crisp's house, as he wanted to relieve any anxiety the blind man might have concerning his absence.

He found Crisp still up and glad to receive him, and from him he learned of old Noah's disappearance, and all about Dora's fears regarding him.

From Crisp's house he went to the hotel where he had last seen Porterhouse, but found that the Southerner had gone away, and he lost him until he went back to the blind detective, and heard from his lips the story of the Louisianian's visit to Gummage and of the golden bait he had held out to the prince of scoundrels.

Len had been longer in the old nest than he thought, for he had no way of calculating time, and when he quitted the blind man the second time, he wondered if Clark Gummage had returned Porterhouse's call.

Before seeking the Southerner he went to Dora's home and learned from her that Noah was still absent. The girl was fearful that he had fallen back into the hands of the men from whom he had rescued the stolen papers which were so precious. He told Dora that they would not be too good to forgive an order on the Trust Company and get them by a lie if they could, and he could not find out if this had been done until the house opened again for business.

He did not find Porterhouse in his new quarters, and was forced at last to go back to Crisp's and sleep till morning, which he did, getting up bright and early, ready for the adventures of the day.

Len could hardly wait till the Trust Company opened its doors, and he was at the counter about ten minutes after it is open.

"Has anybody called for certain papers recently deposited here by Mr. Noah Smithson?" asked the boy ferret.

"Yes, you are about five minutes too late," was the reply which almost staggered Len.

"Who got them?"

"That is too much for us," smiled the clerk. "We were to give them up on order, and that's just what was done."

"Would you mind letting me see the order?"

"Certainly not," and the speaker produced a slip of paper which the young shadow seized with eagerness.

"That's not Noah Smithson's writing," cried Len, holding up the paper, but looking at the spectacled clerk. "It's a pretty good imitation, but it's not it."

"Do you mean to say that the papers were delivered up to some one who bore a forged order?"

"That's just what I mean," was the reply.

"I'm very sorry, sir."

"So am I, as the men who did this neat job are the greatest rascals unhung. What was the man like who got the papers?"

"I did not notice him particularly, as we were busy when he dropped in, but he was tall, well built, and had a smooth face, which I think was a little pitted, though I am not sure."

Seeing that he could get no more information at the counter, the young detective went away, feeling that old Noah's papers had fallen back into the hands of the gang.

"If I had been a little earlier, I might have seen the rascal himself," mused Len. "But in a case of this kind a miss is as good as a mile, and the chances are that we won't see those papers again unless we catch the Cormorants, and maybe not then."

Once more Len Dalray went to Porterhouse's boarding-place and, having been posted by Crisp, asked for Jackson Havens. He was told the person who bore that name had just come in, and being directed to his room, Len ran up-stairs and burst in upon Neil Porterhouse.

The eyes of the Southerner opened wide the moment they saw the boy ferret.

"I'm Jackson Havens for the time being," said the man from the South. "I have set a trap for the cutest rascal in Philadelphia, and am waiting to see whether he will walk into it. Now, what do you know? You have been away long enough to have some news, for if I mistake not you were taken from the waiting-room over Clark Gummage's office by the old man himself."

"Ah, did you guess the truth?" exclaimed the boy. "I can tell you some things, but there must be a limit to my narrative—a place beyond which I cannot go."

"Sworn to secrecy, eh?"

"For ten hours from a certain time."

"Now, go ahead."

Len proceeded and told the story of his adventures up to a certain point, when he stopped abruptly and caused a smile to appear at the Southerner's mouth.

"Don't break your oath, though I would like to hear the rest of the story," said Porterhouse. "You have picked up the very link we want, and the one I'm fishing for."

There was no reply.

"In the mean time, if you want a job, look for old Noah, who seems to have fallen into a trap," said the Cormorant-hunter.

"And for the man who forged the order that secured the papers at the Trust Company's office," cried Len.

"What, have they been captured?" asked Porterhouse, a strange smile crossing his face.

"I have just come from the office where I saw the order that secured them."

Neil Porterhouse opened a locked drawer in the table at which he sat and took out a package at sight of which the eyes of the boy ferret almost jumped from his head.

"Where did you get them?" cried Len. "Did you run across the man who swindled the Trust Company and take them from him?"

"I am the swindler myself—Neil Porterhouse at your service. I took them myself to prevent them

from falling into the hands of the men who seem to have trapped old Noah."

"This being the case, the papers may be called for by the real Cormorants."

"Just so."

"And the way to find who they are and perhaps Noah's whereabouts is to watch the Trust office till the second order is presented, for Noah will never sign one of his own free will, and if the scamps find out where the papers are, they will have to forge an order."

"You are right, Len."

"Then, I am off for the Trust office. If the order comes I won't lose sight of it till I have tracked the bearer down. Take good care of your fish if he comes into the net, Mr. Porterhouse, and trust me to do my part," and the next moment the boy shadow was flying down the stair.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ARROW-HEAD AGAIN.

NEIL PORTERHOUSE sitting in his little room waiting for Clark Gummage resembled a spider at the door of his web waiting for the fly.

He was confident that he had excited the rubber-dealer's curiosity enough to bring him to the house, but the hours passed away and he did not come.

The Southerner had resolved upon a course of action, and was anxious to bring the doers of the old crime to justice, for he was confident that Gummage was the head of the League which long before our story opened had visited the Louisiana home and left death in its wake.

He was anxious, too, to catch the whole lot, and to secure the poisoned arrow-head which he was sure was in Clark Gummage's possession.

That would prove much, and with the missing links, which he believed would be in his hands ere long, he would be at the end of the long hunt.

Why did not Gummage come? Had he suspected a trap at the last moment and was he inclined to have no further dealings with Jackson Havens?

Porterhouse was on the eve of despairing when a footstep sounded on the staircase.

With a smile on his face he looked toward the door and waited for his caller.

In response to the knock he said "Come in" in a cheery voice, and a man who did not look much like Clark Gummage entered.

The Louisianian saw at once that his caller was disguised, and that he was indeed the rubber-dealer of — street.

"I did not want too many eyes after me," protested Gummage, taking a seat opposite the Southerner's chair. "Ours is very private business, you know, and I thought I would put on strange feathers for the present."

"That's all right," answered Porterhouse. "One cannot be too careful nowadays. I am glad to see you, and I hope you have some news of Miss Moss, whom I am hunting just now."

Clark Gummage sent a rapid glance toward the door and seemed to take delight in noticing that it was shut.

"I think I have some news," said he. "You are very anxious to find the woman within three days, I believe?"

"She must be unearthed within that time; after that the will of the English relative becomes worthless, so far as she is concerned."

Then he looked into Gummage's eyes and saw a suspicious light there.

"Would she be prosecuted for complicity in the old crime of the plantation?" the merchant asked cautiously.

"I think not."

"I must have some assurance on this point."

"I will promise you that she will not be prosecuted."

"But would she be required to tell what she might know about the affair?"

"She would not be forced to tell anything. You forget Mr. Gummage, that I have to do only with the estate."

The look that came into the rubber-dealer's eyes at this moment startled Porterhouse.

"I have found Myra Moss," said Gummage, leaning toward the detective, while at the same time he kept one of his hands in his waistcoat pocket. "I think I can direct you to the young lady you are looking for; but— Ah, do you think I'm a fool who can't see through a thin disguise?"

The last words were accompanied by a tiger-like spring across the table of the hand which suddenly shot out of the pocket, and the next instant the other hand, darting forward, too, seized the Southerner's wrist and gripped it tightly.

"Dolt!" cried Gummage, his eyes now on fire as it were. "I know you as well as though you gave me your real name. I know what you want. I did not see through your disguise when you called at my office, but I've had my eyes opened since. You are Neil Porterhouse, and are on that old trail. Do you think you are equal to the Cormorant League? Ha, ha, man, you are even now in its deadly toils!"

Porterhouse saw now what he had not seen before—a dark, needle-pointed arrow-head in Clark Gummage's hand!

As he drew back the barb made a shoot for his hand and the rubber-dealer, rising at the same time, and almost overturning the table, tried desperately to wound him on the wrist.

"You can't escape me," cried Gummage. "I have too much at stake to let you make another move in the game."

Porterhouse was strong and active, but he found in the man he had tried to dupe a foeman worthy of his mettle.

The two men writhed and twisted over the carpet, but Gummage at last succeeded in pressing the

arrow-head against the Southerner's exposed arm, and then held on with a gleam of devilish triumph in his mad eyes.

"Didn't you tell me once—it was at the restaurant—that you were poison proof?" laughed Gummage. "Now prove your assertion. The poison of the Kaffirs is in your system. In a few minutes it will have found the seat of life and the last enemy of the League will be no more. Ah! you've proved a good trailer—a persistent one, too; but the Cormorants have been too much for you. Do you still want Myra Moss? She is able to take care of herself, and that story of the English legacy is all bosh."

Porterhouse felt a strange drowsiness stealing over him while the rubber dealer spoke. He tried to speak, but his tongue seemed to cling to the roof of his mouth.

The dread poison of Africa was at work.

All of a sudden he felt himself sinkin to the floor, but Clark Gummage, now looking for all the world like a fiend, still clung to his hand, and the last thing Porterhouse saw ere darkness came was the laughing eye of his bitter foe.

The room became dark to him; he felt no pain now; in place of it there was a pleasant sensation, but it might mean death, as well as a shooting pang.

Clark Gummage released his victim and went over to the stand in one corner of the room. He looked through it, but found nothing to reward his search. He searched the whole room, only to look disappointed at the end of his hunt, and, looking once more at Porterhouse, he left the place, shutting the door close behind him.

Thirty minutes passed and then the door opened. In came Len, the boy detective, and fell back at sight of the man who lay on the floor.

"It is Porterhouse and all is over with him," cried the young ferret. "This is the work of the Cormorants. They penetrated his disguise, and the fox he was laying for was too sharp for him."

Horrified by the sight, Len stooped over the Southerner and looked into his face. Instead of the pallor of death there was a slight flush, and the moment he felt Porterhouse's pulse the eyes opened and the detective stirred.

"Thank Heaven, you are still this side of the dark river!" exclaimed the boy. "I thought I had found the victim of the League, but you must have fallen in a faint of some kind."

The man from the South, having recovered somewhat, smiled faintly.

"I have been touched by the arrow-head," said he, sitting up again. "The man came here, but he came to kill, and it is not his fault that he did not succeed. I told him at the restaurant, where I suddenly encountered him after reaching the city, that I was poison proof, but he did not believe it, and I was not sure that I wasn't making an empty boast."

Porterhouse took from his pocket a small vial wrapped in dark buckskin, and held it for a moment to his lips.

"If the poison of the Kaffirs has an antidote, it is here," said he, looking at Len. "Daily, since arriving in the city, I have fortified my system with this elixir; but all the time I have doubted its efficacy. Now, it seems to be of some force. I believe it is the only antidote for the African poison. Where did I get it? I bought it of an African traveler in London. There I begin to feel myself once more. But what brought you back so soon? I thought you went off to watch the counters of the Trust Company?"

"So I did, but my work is done; or, at least, I did it as well as I could under the circumstances."

"Tell me."

"I went to the building and first ascertained that no one had called for old Noah's papers since you took them. Then I drew off and began to watch. I had not been on guard more than an hour when a man passed me and slipped into the building. I thought his figure looked a trifle familiar, and I was pretty sure I had piped one of the men with whom Noah had his street battle the night he rescued the papers. I saw him go up to the counter and present a piece of paper. I was sure of my man, now. I could not hear what the clerk told him, but whatever it was, it did not suit him, and after a while he came out, growling like a bear. Then I dodged into the bank and asked the young clerk what was up, and he told me that the man had presented an order for the papers—an order which had old Noah's name attached, and that he had told him that the documents had been carried off on another order."

"Jehu! how I bounded out of that house and followed that man who was still in sight. I didn't want to lose sight of him, for he was too precious to lose. He took me a long chase, but finally halted at a house on Tenth street which looked rather suspicious. As he locked the door after him, I did not get to enter to see what was beyond the step, and so I was forced to leave him there. I'll bet my head, though, that old Noah isn't far off."

"That's my opinion exactly," said Porterhouse. "You've done your work well, as you promised to do, so now we will see what is in that Tenth street house, besides doing something else in another direction. I haven't found Myra Moss yet, because Clark Gummage smelt my trick, and came here to use his arrow-head and get rid of a troublesome fellow."

Neil Porterhouse smiled as he finished, and then looked between the bed-ticking to make sure that certain papers were there, after which he and Len left the house.

"Did you look at old Noah's papers?" asked the boy detective.

"I did, because I thought they might be of some use to me."

"Are they so very important—important enough for Noah to fight for?"

"Ay, that they are."

"Don't they concern Dora?"

The hand of Neil Porterhouse fell softly upon the boy detective's shoulder.

"Let us not pursue this subject at this time," said he, kindly. "I don't think we ought to discuss it anyway. Yes, I will say that the papers which fortunately are in my hands now, do concern Dora, and that they should be guarded with one's life. What am I going to do now? I intend to break up the Cormorant League root and branch within the next ten hours."

"Count on me, Porterhouse," cried Len, seizing the Southerner's hand. "I've been in the trap of the band and I don't owe my release to Clark Gummage, either."

"I know that," smiled the detective. "You owe it to a woman."

"I can't answer you, because the ten hours of my oath have not expired. The moment they are up I will tell you something."

Porterhouse made no reply.

CHAPTER XIX.

NEAR THE END OF THE STRING.

CLARK GUMMAGE went back to his place of business, thinking that by a bit of shrewd playing he had swept the tireless Southerner from his path and by doing so had scored a great victory for the Cormorants.

No more would Porterhouse bother him, and therefore he could afford to rejoice!

It was later in the day and he was the sole occupant of the little office, thinking perhaps of the work he had done with the poisoned arrow-head when the door opened as it had opened a thousand times before.

As Gummage looked up he was confronted by two men, who nodded and came forward—Sandos and his pard.

"What do you think?" at once cried Sandos. "We called at the Trust Company's counter with the order for the papers and were told that somebody had just got them."

Clark Gummage started.

"Somebody got them?" he almost gasped.

"That's what," smiled Sandos. "A pretty slick trick of the old man's seems to me."

Gummage was silent for a moment.

"Have you an idea?" he asked.

"No; unless the man from the South got 'em."

"He'll never use them if he did get them," asserted Gummage. "I know what I'm talking about," viciously.

"But they're gone, that's certain."

"What does the old man say?"

"Says he never gave any one an order for them, and I believe him."

"Those papers must not be lost to us," declared Gummage. "I'll go and look for them."

Sandos and his companion gazed at him in amazement.

"I think I know where to look," he added, and was soon on the street again, somewhat disguised, and in a great hurry.

"Can it be that I overlooked them when in his room?" he asked himself. "If he took them from the bank they must be somewhere on the premises. I won't let them go without a good hunt, for a good deal of wealth hinges on those very papers."

He made his way to the place where he had left the body of the Southerner on the floor, and was met at the door by the mild-faced lady who had met him there on a previous occasion.

In response to his inquiry she said that she did not know whether Mr. Havens was in or not, but he might go up and see for himself, which Gummage was very willing to do.

When he opened the door he got a slight shock, for the floor was not occupied as he had last seen it. He was the sole person in the chamber!

"This is queer, to say the least," thought the rubber-dealer. "I never heard of the arrow failing to do its work. He can't have been taken away without the knowledge of the landlady; but I can't forget my errand," and he went to work ransacking the room, looking in places that he had missed before, but finding nothing, greatly to his disappointment.

As he came down-stairs he came face to face with the little mistress of the house.

"When did Mr. Havens go out?" asked Gummage.

"I'm sure I cannot tell you," was the reply.

"But you have seen him within the last few hours?"

"Oh, yes. He talked some of giving up his room, said he did not think he would want it longer than to-night. He had only rented it for a few days in the first place, and gave me a good figure for it."

Clarke Gummage seemed to choke.

Neil Porterhouse was not dead! The arrow, for once, had failed to do its work! And the execrable villain remembered with a start what the man from the South told him in the restaurant—that he was poison proof! What if it was so? What if he had an antidote for the deadly arrows of the wild Kaffirs?

The rubber-dealer breathed hard while he walked from the house, eager to get away, and fearing that he might come in contact with the very man he wished to avoid. But, fortune favored him, and he got back to his office, unwatched, as he thought, by the keen eyes of his arch foe.

There he almost fell into his chair and trembled.

If Porterhouse had escaped the poison what would happen next?

"A gentleman, sir," said a voice at the door so

suddenly that the chief of the Cormorant League trembled in his chair.

"What is he like, Davy?"

"He's tall and good-looking, seems very anxious to have a talk with you, sir. Says he must, in fact."

Clark Gummage seemed to weigh certain things in his mind.

Davy, the usher, and old Noah's successor, waited at the door.

"I won't take the risk," decided the merchant, and he looked at Davy.

"Say I'm busy with a gentleman," he ordered. "Tell the gentleman to leave his name and call again."

The *attaché* turned away, and Gummage was congratulating himself on the success of his scheme when he heard a hasty footstep and the voice of old Davy.

"He's busy, I tell you," urged the clerk.

"Not too busy to see me," was the answer that seemed to congeal the Gummage blood.

"Good heavens! is that man out there?" gasped the hunted man, even as the door was pushed open.

"Alone? I thought so," grinned the person who came forward with his eyes fastened upon Gummage.

There was no reply, for the rubber-dealer was staring at him, with face destitute of color.

The man before him was Byrd Davidge, the black-mailer, and the person who had forced from him the ten-thousand-dollar check.

"I've got a proposition," Davidge informed the chief, with a grin, as he noticed Gummage's uneasiness. "I got that check cashed without a bit of trouble, but me and my pard have been unlucky. I think the goddess went back on us by prearrangement, and we're as poor as the celebrated church mouse, of which I presume you have heard."

Gummage made no reply; he could only stare at the man and wish him in Hades.

"We've got to have another raise," continued Davidge. "You know we took a big risk when we robbed old Wandel, and brought you his pocketbook which contained, among other things, an arrow-head, which did not look very dangerous without the shaft. Come, don't look at me that way, Mr. Gummage. I own that my errand isn't very welcome to you just now, but business is business—"

"How much do you want now?" broke in the merchant, eager to get rid of the blood-sucker.

"Five thousand apiece," was the business-like rejoinder.

"You want to break me up."

"No; we want to keep you out of Sing Sing, that's all," laughed the lesser scoundrel.

Clark Gummage bit his lip and took out his check-book.

"Payable to bearer, please," reminded Davidge, watching his movements.

"What if I should refuse to give this check?" hesitating over the check-book.

"Just as you like. We don't urge it, my pard and me, but I wouldn't go back on us if I was you."

There was a significance in this which Clark Gummage did not overlook.

"That's the last blood-money you get from me!" said he as he pushed the check toward his visitor.

"Thanks!" was the answer, and, a moment later, Davidge had disappeared.

"I'll set the League on the track of the vampires!" grated Gummage. "I won't be safe while they can get around here to bleed me. Let me see: We've got to work fast now. If Porterhouse escaped the arrow by some sorcery, he must be looked after and silenced beyond all question. I'll issue the orders at once."

He pushed back his chair and got up.

As he reached the door he was met by the errand-boy of the establishment, who thrust a note into his hand.

"A gentleman stopped me on the street and gave it to me," explained the lad, and Len's successor. "He said it was very important, and that he was on the trail, or some such language."

Gummage did not wait to hear further, but stepped back into the office and opened the note.

"Heavens!" fell from his tongue. "One thunder-bolt succeeds another. This is a pretty bad one, coming just now. What if she should fall in with Neil Porterhouse?"

This is what he read:

"I have just come from the Nest. It is empty—not a soul in it from garret to cellar. Myra has gone with the rest."

SANDOS."

No wonder Clark Gummage stood like a statue in the middle of his office. He had to clutch the back of his chair for support, but the whirlwind seemed to pass over in a short time.

"Gone? The old Nest empty? Myra has carried out her threat. She has released the boy ferret and let the man go. Sandos says he is on the trail; but, will he find her? The Cormorant League is in great danger, but it has to be met with a cool head and a steady hand. And I guess I'm cool enough to direct the talons and beak."

He lit a gas-burner over the desk and burned the note; then he went out, with a white face still, almost frightening the employees whom he passed.

They did not know that the man they served was the head of a secret league of blood-stained villains—that he had left his little office for the last time.

Fate was closing in on the Cormorants!

CHAPTER XX.

THE LAST OF THE LEAGUE.

"HELLO! just the man I want to see!" ejaculated a voice at Clark Gummage's elbow as he turned a certain corner.

The rubber-dealer halted, as if struck in the side with a dagger and looked into the face of the speaker.

It was Sandos.

"I got your letter," whispered Gummage. "Is it true that all have escaped?"

"I wouldn't have sent the note if it was a lie," was the reply. "I have lost the woman; but I know she is bent on revealing our identity. To whom? Why, to the Southerner—to Porterhouse, if she can find him."

"If we could find either one of them first—"

"We'd finish the game, eh?"

"That we would!" fiercely.

At that moment, the merchant, looking up and letting his gaze wander across the street, spied a little figure leaning half-way out of a door.

"The boy spy!" he grated, loud enough for his companion to hear him.

"Where?"

"Across the street—in the door of that cigar-store."

Sandos looked, but saw nothing.

"He is on the lookout for Porterhouse," continued Gummage. "I wish I had my hand at his throat for a moment. That would be long enough."

Sandos grinned.

"We must separate for the present. He can't follow two trails at the same time. Turn to the right at the next corner. I will go straight on. Meet me at the end of an hour at your own house. I am known there, and will wait for you."

Sandos nodded and the twain parted at the first corner, which separation was seen by Wide-Awake Len, who slipped from the cigar store for that purpose. The young ferret was determined not to lose sight of the chief villain; therefore he let Sandos proceed on his way, and in a short time had tracked the rubber-dealer to the latter's place, the door of which he opened without knocking and disappeared.

A few minutes later the boy detective turned up in another street and ascended a flight of steps, into a room where he found Carlton Crisp at his window.

"I have treed the head of the League," cried the lad. "I have run Clark Gummage down, and now I want to find Porterhouse."

"He has just gone out with Myra Moss."

"What, was the missing woman here?"

"Yes, and I have listened to the whole story of that terrible crime which turned Porterhouse into a man-hunter. She has fled from the talons of the Cormorants, and is ready to tell all she knows, which is enough to hang more than one man."

"Good for Myra Moss!" exclaimed Wide-Awake Len. "Now, Gummage must be nabbed."

"How's old Noah?"

"Doing as well as can be expected of a man who has been bound to a chair for hours. We got to the Tenth street house in time to save him from a deep fainting fit. The two rascals Sandos and his pard, had left him to die there, for they had lost the documents, thanks to Porterhouse's shrewdness. Noah's the happiest man in Philadelphia, and is eager to testify against the men who entrapped him. I'm off now, for the final round-up, I hope."

At this very moment the man from Feliciana was not far off, playing a game of his own.

He had almost accidentally run across Myra Moss, the tool of the Cormorants, who had escaped from the old Nest near the Park. He had recognized her as his father's former servant, and she had told him much concerning the mysterious crime, and had gone into details concerning Gummage's private life, which was not at all in the scoundrel's favor.

After taking the girl to a place where he knew she would be safe, and out of the reach of the Cormorants, he had turned back to the hot trail again. Success had made him eager. The game was in sight!

A part of this time, though he knew it not, he was watched by a man who had the gliding step of a panther. It was not Sandos, but Sandos's pard, and he came across Porterhouse after he had secured Myra's safety.

"While that man breathes we are not safe," said the wretch under his breath. "He is the implacable foe of the League—the man who has sworn to accomplish our downfall, and will let nothing stop him short of victory and our destruction."

Porterhouse might have seen this man if he had looked back, but absorbed in his hunt, he did not think of such a thing, and kept on. He was in the act of turning a corner when he almost ran against a boy, who at the same time saw the man who was on the Southerner's track.

Len drew back before the villain saw him, and then, gliding up to Porterhouse as if he intended to pass him, he warned him of the shadower.

"The man in brown," announced Len. "Look out for him; he is a Cormorant."

Porterhouse, cool at all times, manifested no outward surprise, but kept on till he reached the open door of a small store, into which he stepped.

The spy stopped and waited for him to come out, but, as he did not, he grew impatient and came on. When he gained the front of the store and was passing, Porterhouse fell upon him, and a well-aimed blow straight from the shoulder sent him half-way across the sidewalk. Before he could regain his footing, he was seized by the man from Louisiana and held with the grip of a giant.

Wide-Awake Len now came back and went with Porterhouse and his prisoner to the nearest station, where a few words of explanation to the sergeant caused the rogue to be held—the first Cormorant to go behind the bars.

Gummage, seated in Sandos's room, was growing exceedingly impatient.

"The hour is up and Sandos isn't here," cried he.

"Has he fallen into the hands of that terrible Porterhouse? I won't think it, probably because I don't want to."

He waited awhile longer; but nobody came.

Then he took from his pocket an arrow-head and examined it in the light.

"I do believe that if that cursed Len Dalray had not crossed our path all would have been well. I never learned, till too late almost, that he was living with Carlton Crisp whom Porterhouse sent up from the South years ago to solve the mystery of the plantation house. The Southern detective lost his eyes by opening an envelope, ha, ha! He should have thrown it in the fire without opening it at all."

Still holding the barb in his hand, Gummage walked to the front window and drew aside the curtain just an inch.

"Hunting me yet?" he cried instinctively, falling back, while his face assumed an ashen pallor.

"There is that boy across the street looking at this house! Can he have tracked me hither? If he has found me it won't be long before Porterhouse knows where I am. The absence of Sandos bothers me. Has he deserted me at the end of the game, when all can yet be recovered by a ten-strike? Is the Cormorant to be crushed by the hand of that man?"

He stood at the window looking at the figure of Len Dalray across the street, and, while he gazed, his eyes seemed to flash fire.

Presently he noticed the boy look to the left, and, following his gaze, he saw advancing down the street the figure of Neil Porterhouse!

He met Len, and the two crossed the street.

In a moment Gummage sprung to the door and saw that it was locked. He now had the look of a wild beast brought to bay.

All this time he had not dropped the arrow-head.

He stood at the table for a full minute, a statue of despair and stubborn resolution.

Footsteps came up the stairs, and Len and Porterhouse reached the top of the flight together.

The young shadower pointed toward a certain door.

"This must be the room," he decided.

Porterhouse knocked, but received no answer.

He knocked again with the same result, and then drew back, looking fixedly at the barrier. Len saw him summon all his strength, and the next moment he launched himself against it, and the door fell in with a loud crash.

The two friends sprung into the room, Porterhouse in advance, and nearly stumbled over a body stretched on the floor.

"Too late," said Wide-Awake Len, looking up into his companion's face.

Porterhouse raised the body and gazed down into the staring eyes, then caught sight of some drops of blood on the right wrist.

"Look! the coward has escaped the law!" cried the Louisianian.

And Len, bending forward, stared at the mark of the arrow-point.

It was true. Clark Gummage, the head of the Cormorant League, was dead, though the smile of bitter triumph which preceded the application of the barb, lingered still on his dark face!

That afternoon a little party were gathered in the humble home of Noah Smithson, and the papers which had passed through so many adventures had been opened for the benefit of Wide-Awake Len and Dora.

The papers were a revelation, sure enough, for they disclosed the fact that Noah's dead wife was the daughter of the elder Porterhouse, of Louisiana, and was, therefore, the detective's own sister. She had married Noah against her father's will, and, dying, had left Dora joint heir with Neil, her uncle, to a splendid estate.

If the execrable Cormorants had obtained possession of the papers, they would have foisted some other girl upon the public for the real heir, and, in the end, have cheated Dora out of her rights.

Porterhouse had hunted down all the members of the League but one, and that person was Sandos, who seemed to have vanished completely.

"I won't stop till I know the fate of every one," avowed the son. "I know that the arrow-head, bought of old Isaac Wandel, and used by Clark Gummage, took my father's life. I have hunted down, with the assistance of plucky Len, and my dear friend, Carlton Crisp, the accursed Order of Cormorants, rightly named, and I know them all. While Myra Moss is not as guilty as we thought her, she did enough, and will atone for her acts in the future. Now for Sandos, the last bird of the foul nest!"

We cannot follow him on his new trail, but suffice it to say that in the end he was successful, tracking Sandos down and seeing both him and his pard pay for their many and detestable crimes.

Ralph Mennesse, the missing watchman who was confined in the Nest, left it when Myra did, and returned to his family.

The firm of Gummage & Blynn is no more, owing to Mr. Gummage's "sudden retirement."

Porterhouse has taken up his residence in the City of Brotherly Love, and Wide-Awake Len, who, some day, will become a member of Noah Smithson's little family, still lives with Carlton Crisp, whose one regret is that Clark Gummage managed to cheat the law.

"Cowards generally do that," he says on reflection; "but Len, my boy, the Cormorant League will trouble us no more. I can never see Dora, but I know she is one of the best girls in the country, because she has Porterhouse blood in her veins. Heaven bless you both!"

THE END.

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 321 Deadwood Dick's Dozen; or, The Fakir of Phantom Flats.
 347 Deadwood Dick's Ducats; or, Days in the Diggings.
 351 Deadwood Dick's Sentence; or, The Terrible Vendetta.
 362 Deadwood Dick's Claim.
 405 Deadwood Dick in Dead City.
 410 Deadwood Dick's Diamonds.
 421 Deadwood Dick in New York; or, A "Cute Case."
 430 Deadwood Dick's Dust; or, The Chained Hand.
 448 Deadwood Dick, Jr.
 448 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Defiance.
 453 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Full Hand.
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 465 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Racket at Claim 10.
 471 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Corral; or, Bozeman Bill.
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 496 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Inheritance.
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 534 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Death Hunt.
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 544 Deadwood Dick, Jr., the Wild West Video.
 549 Deadwood Dick, Jr., on His Mettle.
 554 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Gotham.
 561 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Boston.
 567 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Philadelphia.
 572 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Chicago.
 578 Deadwood Dick, Jr., Afloat.
 584 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Denver.
 590 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Decree.
 595 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Beelzebub's Basin.
 600 Deadwood Dick, Jr., at Coney Island.
 608 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Leadville Lay.
 612 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Detroit.
 618 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Cincinnati.
 624 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Nevada.
 630 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in No Man's Land.
 636 Deadwood Dick, Jr., After the Queer.
 642 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Buffalo.
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 684 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Dazzle.
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 700 Deadwood Dick, Jr., Drop.
 704 Deadwood Dick, Jr., at Jack-Pot.
 710 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in San Francisco.

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26 Cloven Hoof, the Buffalo Demon.
 32 Bob Woolf; or, The Girl Dead-Shot.
 39 Death-Fnee, Detective; or, Life in New York.
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 53 Jim Bludsoe, Jr., the Boy Phenix.
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 69 Gold Rifle, the Sharpshooter; or, The Boy Detective.
 80 Rosebud Rob; or, Nugget Ned, the Knight.
 84 Idyl, the Girl Miner; or, Rosebud Rob on Hand.
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 96 Watch-Eye; or, Arabs and Angels of a Great City.
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 117 Gilt-Edged Dick, the Sport Detective.
 121 Cinnamon Chip, the Girl Sport.
 125 Bonanza Bill, Miner.
 133 Boss Bob, the King of Bootblacks.
 141 Solid Sam, the Boy Road-Agent.
 145 Captain Ferret, the New York Detective.
 161 New York Nell, the Boy-Girl Detective.
 177 Nobby Nick of Nevada; or, The Sierras Scamps.
 181 Wild Frank, the Buckskin Bravo.
 209 Fritz, the Bound-Boy Detective.
 213 Fritz to the Front; or, The Ventriloquist Hunter.
 226 Snoozer, the Boy Sharp; or, The Arab Detective.
 236 Apollo Bill, the Trail Tornado.
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 244 Sierra Sam, the Frontier Ferret.
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 253 Sierra Sam's Pard; or, The Angel of Big Vista.
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 368 Yreka Jim, the Gold-Gatherer; or, The Life Lottery.
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 382 Cool Kit, the King of Kids; or, A Villain's Vengeance.
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 389 Bicycle Ben; or, The Lion of Lightning Lode.
 394 Yreka Jim of Yuba Dam.
 406 Wrinkles, the Night-Watch Detective.
 416 High Hat Harry, the Base Ball Detective.
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 434 Jim Beck and Pal, Private Detectives.
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 486 SealSkin Sam, the Sparkler.

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 204 Gold Plume; or, Buffalo Bill, the Pony Express Rider.
 216 Bison Bill, the Prince of the Pines; or, Buffalo Bill's Pluck.
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 276 Merle Monte's Cruise; or, The Gold Ship's Chase.
 280 Merle Monte's Fate; or, Poor, the Miner's Bride.
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 308 Keno Kit; or, Dead Shot Dandy's Double.
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 383 The Indian Pilot; or, The Search for Pirate Island.
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 402 Isador, the Young Conspirator; or, The Fatal League.
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 450 Wizard Will; or, The Boy Ferret of New York.
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 462 The Born Guide; or, The Sailor Boy Wanderer.
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 474 Flora; or, Wizard Will's Vagabond Pard.
 483 Ferrets Alloft; or, Wizard Will's Last Case.
 487 Nevada Ned, the Revolver Ranger.
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 550 Lafitte's Leguey; or, The Avenging Son.
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 565 Kent Kingdon, the Card King.
 570 Camille, the Card Queen.
 575 The Surgeon-Scout Detective.
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 591 Delmonte, the Young Sea Rover.
 597 The Young Texan Detective.
 602 The Vagabond of the Mines.
 607 The Rover Detective; or, Keno Kit's Champions.
 617 Ralph, the Dead-Shot Scout; or, The Rio Raiders.
 644 The Hercules Highwayman.
 650 Butterfly Billy, the Pony Rider Detective; or, Buffalo Bill's Boy Pard.
 656 Butterfly Billy's Man Hunt.
 662 Butterfly Billy's Bonanza.
 668 The Buccaneer Midshipman.
 674 The Wizard Sailor; or, Red Ralph, the Rover.
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 692 The Rival Sharps; or, Redfern, the Secret Service Scout.
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118 Will Somers, the Boy Detective.
 122 Phil Hardy, the Boss Boy.
 126 Pleasure Pete; or, Nicodemus, the Dog Detective.
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 142 Handsome Harry, the Bootblack Detective.
 147 Will Wildfire, the Thoroughbred.
 152 Black Bass, Will Wildfire's Racer.
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 162 Will Wildfire in the Woods.
 165 Billy Baggage, the Railroad Boy.
 170 A Trump Card; or, Will Wildfire Wins and Loses.
 174 Bob Rockett; or, Mysteries of New York.
 179 Bob Rockett, the Bank Runner.
 183 The Hidden Hand; or, Will Wildfire's Revenge.
 187 Fred Halyard, the Life Boat Box; or, The Smugglers.
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 196 Shadowed; or, Bob Rockett's Fight for Life.
 206 Dark Paul, the Tiger King.
 212 Dashing Dave, the Dandy Detective.
 220 Tom Tanner; or, The Black Sheep of the Flock.
 225 Sam Charcoal, the Premium Darky.
 235 Shadow Sam, the Messenger Boy.
 242 The Two "Bloods"; or, Shenandoah Bill and His Gang.
 252 Dick Dashaway; or, A Dakota Boy in Chicago.
 262 The Young Sharp; or, Rollieking Mike's Hot Trail.
 274 Jolly Jim, the Detective Apprentice.
 289 Jolly Jim's Job; or, The Young Detective.
 298 The Water-Hound; or, The Young Thoroughbred.
 305 Dashaway, of Dakota; or, A Western Lad in Quaker City.
 324 Ralph Ready, the Hotel Boy Detective.
 341 Tony Thorne, the Vagabond Detective.
 353 The Reporter-Detective; or, Fred Flyer's Blizzard.
 367 Wild-Awake Joe; or, A Boy of the Times.
 379 Larry, the Leveler; or, The Bloods of the Boulevard.
 403 Firefly Jack, the River-Rat Detective.
 423 The Lost Finger; or, The Entrapped Cashier.
 428 Fred Flyer, the Reporter Detective.
 432 Invincible Logan, the Pinkerton Ferret.
 456 Billy Brick, the Jolly Vagabond.
 466 Wild-Awake Jerry, Detective; or, Entombed Alive.
 479 Detective Dodge; or, The Mystery of Frank Hearty.
 488 Wild Dick Racket.
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860 Silver-Mask, the Man of Mystery.
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 424 Cubta John; or, Red-Hot Times at Ante Bar.
 439 Sandy Sam, the Street Scout.
 467 Disco Dan, the Daisy Duke.
 490 Broadway Billy, the Bootblack Bravo.
 506 Redlight Ralph, the Prince of the Road.
 514 Broadway Billy's Boddie.
 524 The Engineer Detective.
 536 Broadway Billy's "Dillikilt."

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 557 Broadway Billy's Death Racket.
 571 Air-Line Luke the Young Engineer.
 579 The Chimney Spy; or, Broadway Billy's Surprise-Party.
 592 The Boy Pinkerton.
 605 William O' Broadway; or, The Boy Detective's Big Inning.
 615 Fighting Harry the Chief of Chained Cyclone.
 628 Broadway Billy's Dead Act.
 640 Bareback Beth, the Centaur of the Circle.
 647 Typewriter Tilly, the Merchant's Ward.
 659 Moonlight Morgan, the "Pizenest" Man of Ante Bar.
 669 Broadway Billy Abroad.
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 687 Broadway Billy in Clover.
 696 Broadway Billy in Texas.
 708 Broadway Billy's Brand.
 711 Broadway Billy at Santa Fe.

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23 Nick o' the Night; or, The Boy Spy of '76.
 37 The Hidden Lodge; or, The Little Hunter.
 47 Nightingale Nat; or, The Forest Captain.
 64 Dandy Jack; or, The Outlaws of the Oregon Trail.
 82 Kit Harefoot the Wood-Hawk.
 94 Midnight Jack; or, The Boy Trapper.
 106 Old Frosty, the Guide; or, The White Queen.
 128 Kiowa Charley, the White Mustanger.
 139 Judge Lynch, Jr.; or, The Boy Vigilante.
 155 Gold Trigger, the Sport; or, The Girl Avenger.
 169 Tornado Tom; or, Injin Jack from Red Core.
 188 Ned Temple, the Border Boy.
 198 Arkansas; or, The Queen of Fate's Revenge.
 207 Navajo Nick, the Boy Gold Hunter.
 215 Captain Bullet; or, Little Tonknot's Crusade.
 231 Plucky Phil; or, Rosa, the Red Jezebel.
 241 Bill Bravo; or, The Roughs of the Rockies.
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 267 The Buckskin Detective.
 279 Old Winch; or, The Buckskin Desperadoes.
 294 Dynamite Dan; or, The Bowie Blade of Cochitopa.
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 316 Old Eclipse, Trump Card of Arizona.
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 418 Felix Fox, the Boy Spotter.
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 543 Dodger Dick's Double; or, The Rival Boy Detective.
 553 Dodger Dick's Desperate Case.
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 573 The Two Shadows.
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